



**Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
February 16, 2021**

**Senate Bill 646
Alcohol and Drug Counseling - Alcohol and Drug Trainees - Practice Through Telehealth
Support**

MADC supports Senate Bill 646 for the permanent approval of Alcohol and Drug Trainee counselors (ADTs) to utilize telehealth technology to provide facility-based treatment services under the existing COMAR requirements for supervision and scope of practice. The Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists (BOPCT) authorized temporary approval for ADTs to provide telehealth treatment during the State of Emergency in April 2020.

ADTs have been integrated into direct service staff at providers delivering substance use disorder (SUD) treatment for all levels of outpatient as well as residential care. As per COMAR, ADTs can only be employed at licensed treatment agencies. This means ADTs cannot work at a private practice or any other treatment setting unless the setting has a State license for an ASAM level of care with supervision and agency regulations detailed by COMAR and by national accreditation organizations.

ADTs make up a significant portion of the SUD treatment workforce. Facility-based providers have needed to expand services in the face of the growing opioid overdose crisis, and due to the significant shortage of incoming licensed and higher-certified counselors, ADTs have represented a growing segment of the workforce. The BOPCT's 2019 Annual Report indicates that 249 ADTs received trainee status in 2019. This constituted 69% of the certified level staff coming into the field for 2019. That report also shows that ADTs compose 40% of the workforce at the certified level with 802 ADTs holding trainee status in 2019.

ADTs are critical to provider staff and the continuing delivery of treatment services. Many providers cannot fill existing positions due to the continuing workforce shortages. In order to provide a snapshot of the service impact, nine MADC providers from across the State, representing the full continuum of SUD care, indicated in March of 2020 that they employ 90 ADTs serving 1,473 clients.

When the BOPCT updated telehealth regulations in 2019 and excluded ADTs from telehealth delivery there was no objection from MADC providers because SUD treatment services including intensive outpatient and residential treatment were not authorized for any

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telehealth services by the State. This made the ADT exclusion a non-issue for providers. But now that telehealth has been made broadly available as a service delivery mechanism, we believe the entire workforce should be allowed to utilize it when the clinician and the client believe it is the best way to deliver and receive services.

In summary, ADTs are a critical workforce component for SUD treatment providers. MADC asks for your support for the permanent approval for ADTs to provide telehealth treatment services under the existing regulations related to scope of practice and supervision. We urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 646.

Sincerely,

Kim Wireman

Kim Wireman, LCSW-C, LCADC
Board Member