

# North Carolina Association of Pastoral Counselors

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## NC Certified Pastoral Counselors...

- Are highly educated clergy who are ordained, or licensed as ministers.
- **Save taxpayers' money by reducing health care costs**, slowing down the revolving door of repeated psychiatric hospitalizations of chronically mentally ill patients, whose hospital care is reimbursed by **government entitlement programs. This makes wise business sense.**
- **Provide a significant amount of pro bono (free, or low-fee) care to low income and uninsured patients** through donations from congregations in their areas that support Pastoral Counseling Centers.
- **Provide an estimated 850 patient-hours of Pastoral Counseling each week, or 42,500 patient-hours per year.**
- **Agree with the bill's intent to reduce taxes, but in fact the bill, "Amend APA/Sunset Occupational Licensing Boards" has an unintended opposite effect. It will raise taxes. Pastoral Counselors oppose wasteful governmental entitlement spending.**
- Have completed a bachelor's degree from a college or university, a Master of Divinity degree from a seminary/divinity school, and at least one additional masters or doctoral degree in counseling or psychotherapy.
- Must have completed at least 1375 hours of counseling with patients or clients while receiving at least 250 hours of close supervision of this counseling by a certified pastoral counseling supervisor.
- Are experts in helping patients/clients from a variety of religious denominations or faith groups to live faithfully and deal with their mental health issues according to their own faith and values.
- Adhere to the code of ethics of their own faith group/denomination, and the code of ethics of Fee-Based Practicing Pastoral Counselors.
- **Are strongly supported by pastors and congregations who want mental health care that respects their members' religious faith.**
- **Do not expend state or federal tax dollars.** The NC Board of Examiners of Fee-Based Practicing Pastoral Counselors **is self-funded** through annual dues and certification fees from its members.

## Pastoral Counselors in North Carolina Should Remain Certified...

- To protect the health and welfare of the citizens of North Carolina.
- To assure competent, sensitive, safe and effective mental healthcare for the citizens of North Carolina.
- **To prevent job loss and unemployment of the 58 Pastoral Counselors in NC and their clerical staff who would be financially harmed if this bill passes.**
- **To prevent harm to patients currently receiving Pastoral Counseling in NC who would be damaged and traumatized by the loss of the therapist they trust in the midst of their treatment: an ethical issue.**
- **To prevent harm to students currently in Pastoral Counseling Doctoral and Masters Degree Programs who would graduate with no prospect for employment in the State of NC: another ethical issue.**

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## Please Do Not Sunset the State Board of Examiners of Fee-Based Practicing Pastoral Counselors and Eliminate Licensing Requirements for Fee-Based Practicing Pastoral Counselors

The North Carolina Association of Pastoral Counselors (NCAPC) and the State Board of Examiners of Fee-Based Practicing Pastoral Counselors oppose this proposal for the following reasons:

1. **Eliminating the Board of Examiners and its certification requirements will eliminate jobs in North Carolina.** It is illegal to practice counseling in North Carolina without state licensure or certification. **Repeal of Article 26 will force pastoral counselors in NC to close their practices or move to states where they can legally practice. Many pastoral counseling practices are also small businesses, employing administrative staff in addition to counseling staff.** It is our understanding that the rationale for eliminating pastoral counseling requirements is to remove barriers to economic growth. **Repeal of Article 26 has the clearly unintended but opposite impact.**

2. **It will affect people of faith who need mental health care.** A Gallup survey found that **nearly 80% of Americans prefer a therapist who respects the patient's faith.** Clinical research demonstrates overwhelmingly that treatment outcomes improve when counselors skillfully include their patient's faith as part of the counseling process. Pastoral counselors are the only mental health providers in North Carolina with specialized education and training in this work. **Some persons in need of treatment distrust secular providers and will only accept help from a pastoral counselor.** Eliminating pastoral counseling in NC will deprive religious people of this safe harbor.

3. **It will harm persons currently receiving care from pastoral counselors.** There are currently 58 certified fee-based practicing pastoral counselors in North Carolina, serving thousands of patients in agencies, group practices, private practices, and free health clinics across the state. **Elimination of pastoral counseling in North Carolina will interrupt these patients' care, have a detrimental impact on their mental health, and add to the burden of an already overwhelmed mental health service system.**

4. **It will have a detrimental impact on churches and other systems of care.** Pastoral counselors provide support, consultation, and training for clergy, physicians, nurses, and other mental health providers. **When a pastor is dealing with a suicidal parishioner, or when a secular therapist needs to understand the spiritual factors that might impact a patient's care, their first call is often to a pastoral counselor.** Repeal of Article 26 will also eliminate this valuable public service to communities across the state.

**Thank you for reading this document and seeking to understand the adverse impact this proposed legislation will have on mental health care of people in North Carolina, on people of faith who need mental health care.**