

Committee for hearing the bill and making the appropriate changes to make a bill that is workable, and all of those that have been through the whole process over the last few years that have avoided the turf wars, that have avoided the finger pointing, and said we really need to get together and do what's best for the people that we are trying to serve. And they really have done, I think, what could be called government or working out legislation at its best. They put on their let's get to work, put on their...rolled up their sleeves, and they simply have gotten the job done, and I want to thank them, first of all, in the very beginning. LB 669 is designed to create a new health profession, that of a licensed mental health practitioner. This profession would require a minimum of a masters degree and 3,000 hours of postgraduate internship for licensure. Persons currently certified as master social workers and as professional counselors, as well as many marriage and family therapists, and others within the appropriate education and training would be eligible for immediate licensure. Master social workers, professional counselors, and marriage and family therapists would also have specific certifications that would allow them to use their professional titles to distinguish themselves to the public. Persons currently licensed or certified by the state in similar fields, such as psychologists, alcohol and drug abuse counselors would be exempted from the act, as would pastoral counselors, but others who are not currently certified and who do not meet the licensure requirements would not be permitted to provide mental health services that fall within the scope of the practice of this profession. Quite honestly, what we have in front of us, members of the body, is something that I think is a giant step forward in the health care area, particularly in the mental health profession, and what we are doing, for the most part, is combining two boards into one and we are bringing in more people within the certification process so that there can be more people certified to practice the mental health profession in the State of Nebraska, but we are also closing the door for just anyone who can come out in the public, call themselves a therapist and begin giving mental health advice and counsel when they have no training and they have no education in this particular area. We've had cases, not only in Nebraska, but in other states, where people have lost their licenses but have been able to simply refer themselves as a therapist, put up a shingle, continue to counsel the same people, still do the same things that got them in trouble or fined or lost their licensure in other areas, and there is nothing the state could do about