



What's Inside:

- [Letter from the President](#)
- [Letter from the Editor](#)
- [Reflections on Legislation and Future Advocacy](#)
- [Committee Updates](#)
- [Registration is Open: TAMFT 2024 Annual Conference](#)
- [Medicare Policy Update December 2023](#)
- [Student Corner](#)
- [CEU Opportunities](#)



WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER

LEGISLATION IN A NON-
LEGISLATIVE SESSION YEAR

WWW.TAMFT.ORG |    



TAMFT PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: WHY EVERY MFT IN TEXAS SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN LEGISLATION ADVOCACY

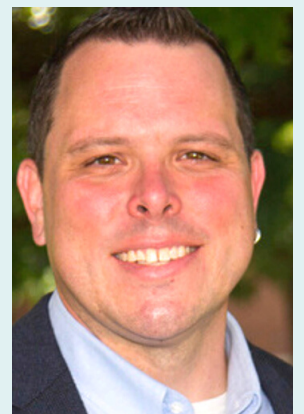
JASON MARTIN, PH.D., LMFT-S, LPC-S

At the very end of 2022, the Mental Health Access Improvement Act was signed into federal law, paving the way for LMFTs and LPCs to be recognized as Medicare-eligible providers. This was the culmination of many years of work to bring LMFTs into parity with other providers, enabling them to offer services to Medicare beneficiaries and receive reimbursement from Medicare. This milestone was achieved through the hard work of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC), and others.

However, it was not merely lobbyists and association employees who made this happen. Thousands of volunteers nationwide, most of whom were practicing Marriage and Family Therapists, generously contributed their time and resources. Any bill that passes into law, whether at the state or federal level, depends on people advocating for it. Advocacy can take various forms, such as contributing to a PAC, such as the Texas Family PAC, calling and writing legislators, spreading the word to others and recruiting their involvement, or sometimes testifying before legislative committees about the bill.

This is where the ongoing engagement of MFTs like yourself becomes crucial. It can be easy to believe that as long as you can do the work you enjoy, providing therapeutic services to individuals and families, you don't need to be otherwise involved. The tricky part, however, is that your ability to do that job is precisely why we need everyone involved. The recognition of MFTs as Medicare-eligible providers is the latest legislative success story, but many of us can remember when our right to practice at all was under threat, as the Texas Medical Association (TMA) sued the Texas Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists (TSBEMFT). The suit threatened to either eliminate MFTs' right to practice independently in Texas or at least restrict how they practice and are compensated. The Texas Supreme Court ruling in 2017 helped to further clarify LMFT's right to diagnose, and that right was soon made explicit in the Texas Occupational Code.

However, these are only a few of the most notable recent reasons why MFTs, even those perhaps put off by the legislative process, should nonetheless engage in that process. While not every issue may directly affect your ability to practice, meaningful and important bills come before the American Congress and the Texas legislature every session. Your engagement and participation are critical to being able to practice and help our clients to the best of our abilities. I urge every MFT in Texas to make it a priority in this new year to learn more about the legislative issues affecting our practice and become involved, either by donating funds or volunteering your time. Together, we can continue to make the profession that our clients deserve.



Jason Martin (he/him), Ph.D., LMFT-S, LPC-S
President, TAMFT

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

REBEKAH TORRES, LMFT ASSOCIATE, TAMFT ASSOCIATE REPRESENTATIVE

Hello everyone! This quarter's newsletter is designed to provide more information regarding legislative topics during the "off-season" of the government. As you are aware, this year is a year in which the legislature is not in session. So, the question is - "What can we do to support them while there is no dire need to push bills?" The answer to this is simple - Stay active and involved.



We are researching more and more information about the advancement of mental health practices. By now, I'm sure that you are aware of the updates and adaptations of the Mental Health Access Improvement Act and its influence on mental health professionals and the relationship with Medicare. Although we don't have a lot of information on this topic, we are collaborating on researching the information so that the field can be better supported throughout this adaptation. This also brings into question the scope of responsibilities for LMFT Associates and "incident to" billing. I, at this time, don't have a lot of answers for these two topics, but can recommend reaching out to TAMFT and/or your respective supervisor (if you are an LMFT Associate) if there are questions.

As a reminder, TAMFT has a PAC committee and a Legislative committee in which you can participate in. These roles do not require a lot of time commitments and can be used as a gateway to explore more leadership roles in the field and within TAMFT. If you are interested in getting involved or have any questions, please contact TAMFT.

TAMFT is also excited to invite you all to our 2024 Conference, which you will read more about in the newsletter. It will be filled with educational, networking, and fun opportunities for you and your friends, so be sure to register before it is too late!

With 2023 behind us and 2024 just beginning, I am looking forward to where the year takes us! I hope this helps!

Enjoy the rest of the newsletter.

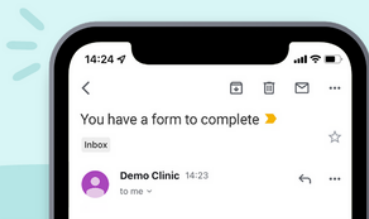
Cordially,
Rebekah Torres, LMFT Associate
Supervised by Amy Birchill Laverne, M.Ed., LMFT-S, LPC-S



An intake form reminder a day keeps the schedule without delay

Jane is a complete practice management software that offers free, fully integrated Online Intake Forms – ensuring a smooth patient or client experience from the moment they walk through the door.

[Learn More](#)



Please take a moment to fill out our online intake form before your visit.

HELP SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR FAMILY PAC BY PURCHASING TAMFT MERCH!



[VISIT THE TAMFT MERCH SHOP!](#)



JOIN TAMFT TODAY!

By joining TAMFT, you show your commitment to advancing marriage and family therapy in Texas

Other member benefits include:

- Involvement in legislation that directly impacts your career
- Access to Texas-based attorney with free consultations
- 12 free CEUs each year, plus bonus webinars (\$360 VALUE)
- Discounts on conferences, online courses, tuition/services and more
- Networking with like-minded individuals



TAMFT.org/Join-TAMFT

REFLECTIONS ON LEGISLATION AND FUTURE ADVOCACY

TIM WHITE, MA, LMFT | TAMFT BOARD MEMBER-AT-LARGE AND PAC CHAIR

As many of you know, the last legislative session was quite acrimonious. This led to legislative disappointments for the TAMFT in that we did not get much done. The good news is that there wasn't anything passed that is detrimental to our license, one bill was passed that enables the expansion of reimbursement, and some lessons were learned that will help us better prepare for the next legislative session. We believe we are better positioned now to pass future legislation to meet the growing mental health needs in our ever-more mobile society.



One of the key lessons learned is the CRUCIAL importance of having LMFTs available and ready to go to the capitol building in Austin to testify on bills that impact our license. That was a big struggle last year. The Legislative Committee is working on a call roster for LMFTs to volunteer to be on standby. Please look for further updates on this soon.

What can you do?

Support TAMFT Family PAC!

Your TAMFT Family PAC works to support those Legislators who are friendly to our cause and our license. This is more important now than ever, as many in the legislature do not understand who we are, what we do, and how we do it. Consequently, we are often met with either passive opposition from a lack of understanding or active opposition for other political reasons. Our professional association is the only mental health profession in Texas that has a PAC, which makes us the smallest group with the biggest impact! We can not look at the wins of the past and think we have arrived with no more work to do. We must recognize the need for ongoing advocacy for ourselves, our clients, and our license. Your TAMFT Family PAC is the best way to do that. Please consider donating soon as the TAMFT Legislative Committee will be working with our lobbyist, the incomparable Tris Castañeda, to recommend which legislators to fund in March.

Thank you for your support and encouragement. Encourage your peers to get involved and support Family PAC as well. We want you to continue practicing and serving the needs of all Texans, and we need your help to make that happen.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

LEGISLATIVE & PAC UPDATE

Members: *Dr. Carlos Perez, Board Liaison; Marion Vickerman, Board Liaison; Tim White, PAC Chairman; Jaida Pryor, Student Association Liaison; Hannah McKinnies; Tara Roper; Sommer Greer; Gabrielle Dean; Kristin Ross; Mercedes Burk; Andrea Beth Jackson (Rep for BHEC standardization only)*

Happy New Year from the TAMFT Legislative Committee. Even though we aren't in legislative session, there are several things we're keeping our eyes on.

- We are working hard at license portability. There are currently several bills being drafted that will allow our license, both in and out of Texas, to be easily transferable. This is top on our watch list in the next coming year.
- We now have the ability to bill for Medicare – this is a huge step forward for our license. If you haven't received the email about opting in or out, see [this link](#) for more information.



With such big things happening in the legislative world of our license, please consider [supporting our PAC efforts](#). This goes a long way in helping further our license.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE UPDATE

Members: *Angela Hayes, Chair; Carlos Perez; Jason Martin; Layla Scott; Joanna Mendez-Pounds, Elections Committee Chair*

The governance committee has been actively working on a couple of initiatives to streamline the volunteer and voting process, including creating a welcome packet for committee and board service as well as expanding the TSAMFT board elections to allow more students to participate. Governance committee chair, Angela Hayes, also spearheaded a proposed bylaw change to allow more MFT associates to participate in board service. Remember with elections coming up now is the time to volunteer or nominate someone for open board positions. TAMFT runs on the passion and talent of our volunteers and we need you!

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE

Members: *Rebekah Torres, Chair & Board Liaison; Misty Schmidt; Kim Khuyen Nguyen; Fariba Arabghani; Crystal Lina Lopez*

The Communications Committee remains hard at work, supporting the initiatives of our other committees. Most recently, we had a successful Giving Season campaign for Family PAC, helping highlight "swag" in our Bonfire Store through website, emails and social posts. In a month of marketing, we were able to raise over \$1,500 for Family PAC!

We look forward to spending the next few months helping spread the word about the 2024 Conference and hope to see all of you in San Antonio in April!

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

Members: Joann Travis-Evans, co-Chair; Anna Thomison, co-Chair; Layla Scott, Board Liaison; Mi'cah Ducros; Hannah McKinnies; Heather Austin-Robillard; Heather Lucero

As we close out 2023, we are excited to report some of the successes of the Membership Committee:

The annual Fall Student Membership Drive

- 76% increase in Student members since 2020
- Currently the association has 292 Student members
- Giveaway prizes included gift cards, DSMs, and 2 student snack parties
- A total of 34 new Student members
- Abilene Christian University was top MFT program with the most Students signing up and received a plaque of appreciation to display in their program office.



Our appreciation to all participants and welcome new Student members!

- Offered Digital Networking Opportunities for Membership Professional Development
- Annual Budget Review and Submitted Recommendations
- Disseminated the Membership Survey

The committee goals for 2024 are as follows:

- Reviewing the Membership Committee's responsibilities, recruiting new committee members
- Articulating and reviewing initiatives
- Reviewing and redesigning program for non-members LMFTs and LMFT Associates to join TAMFT
- Building stronger relationships between TAMFT and the directors/ liaisons of the programs currently offering undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs in Marriage & Family Therapy
- Review and revise the Mentor Program

On behalf of the Membership Committee, we thank TAMFTs members for their support and participation in 2023. We look forward to another great year ahead!

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE UPDATE

Members: Kelsey Austin, co-Chair & Board Liaison; Emily Esail, co-Chair, Melinda Barsales; Brandon Gardenhire; Taylor Conable; Lisl Stadler

The Conference Committee has been excitedly crafting a conference experience that is both informative and engaging for the upcoming annual conference. We're can't believe TAMFT has been serving MFTs in Texas for 50 years! To throw a conference that celebrates such a special milestone, we have been meeting with keynote candidates and securing an exciting lineup. We're also intentional about reaching out to potential sponsors and exhibitors that we feel bring value to the work that our members do. We continue to be open to new ideas, so please feel free to send them our way!

ETHICS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Members: Ty Leonard, Chair; Layla Scott, Board Liaison; Michael (Charles) Flynn; Lisa Salazar; Paula Boros; Brianna Tran

The newly combined Ethics and Social Justice committee is excited for the new year and is working on outlining initiatives for 2024 that support ethics and DEIJ (diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice) at the organizational level and provide resources and support to our members. If you have ideas or needs that you would like to be considered by the committee please email info@tamft.org Attention Ethics & Social Justice Committee.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

Members: Nelliana Acuna, co-Chair; Leila Anderson, co-Chair; Robyn Flores, Secretary; Dr. Wen-Mei Chou, Board Liaison; Benita Madison; Hannah McKinnies; Baldemar Menchaca; Jose Mata; Christina Watts-Figueroa

The Education Committee is committed to delivering valuable monthly education to our members for a total of 26 CEUs every two years. Regardless of your need for hours, attending training is a great way to continue education, learn from colleagues, and feel connected to the field.

The Education Committee is preparing webinars for the 2024 calendar year. Upcoming topics include discussions on social justice, sex therapy, and working with complex trauma/human trafficking. Additionally, panel discussions about supervision topics in February and May are being planned for students and new Associates. Be on the lookout for more details about each webinar in the coming months!

Opportunities to serve on the Education Committee will be available soon – if you have an interest in joining, please complete the committee service form [HERE](#) , or find us at the next conference!



2024 TAMFT Conference

We are excited to announce the 2024 TAMFT Annual Conference on April 11-13, 2024, in San Antonio! This year's theme, "Celebrating 50 Years of TAMFT: Embracing the Past, Enriching the Present, Empowering the Future" is dedicated to the reflection of how far our profession has come and the continued evolution of our innovative field. Keynotes and workshops will honor the foundations of our field, showcase emerging treatments and theories, and inspire critical conversations about the co-creation of the future of marriage and family therapy. Systemic thinkers from Texas and beyond will have the opportunity to gain new skills, share their own research, as well as forge new connections and rekindle professional flames.

[REGISTER
TODAY!](#)

[BOOK
HOTEL](#)

MEDICARE POLICY UPDATE DECEMBER 2023

Hello TAMFT Members and friends!

We hope 2023 is coming to a productive and positive conclusion for you all! As many of you have heard, LMFTs will be eligible to bill Medicare as of January 1, 2024, provided they have properly enrolled. While each clinician must decide how this change will affect their practice, the TAMFT Board believes this to be great news for the profession overall. As with any legal change, however, there are bound to be some surprises and this change is no different.

First and foremost, clinicians who decide not to enroll to be a Medicare provider CANNOT simply practice as usual. **EVEN IF YOU DO NOT PLAN TO ENROLL AS A MEDICARE PROVIDER, YOU MUST OPT OUT OF MEDICARE.** Clinicians cannot ignore this change.

According to The Social Security Act (Section 1848(g)(4)), a service provider must either opt out of filing claims for Medicare beneficiaries OR become a Medicare provider. The consequences of failing to do either are serious. If a clinician privately contracts with a Medicare beneficiary who then submits a superbill, Medicare may penalize clinicians who do not opt out. This could result in a penalty of as much as \$2000 per violation. Therefore, clinicians could be in violation and not even know it.

To avoid such violations, providers who do not wish to enroll with Medicare MUST opt out. However, some insurance contracts may require eligible clinicians to be enrolled in Medicare. Choosing to opt out could be a violation of the contract, and the insurance company could drop the clinician for non-compliance.

LMFTs need to decide whether they are going to enroll to become a Medicare or not. This is a personal choice that has many factors. Please do your due diligence when making this decision, including consulting existing insurance agreements. If a clinician wants to learn more about enrolling in Medicare and integrating it into their practice, AAMFT has put together some informative resources [HERE](#), including a series of webinars, with information that LMFTs should know.

If a clinician wants to opt out, however, the clinician must complete and submit an opt-out affidavit for their state. (The opt-out affidavit for Texas LMFTs can be found [HERE](#).) The affidavit should be sent to the address at the top of the form, mail or fax only. The clinician will then be opted out of the Medicare program for a mandated two years. The opt-out is automatically renewed every two years.

The need for an opt-out came as a surprise to the board in recent days, but this should be done before the beginning of 2024 to avoid inadvertent penalties.

In summary:

- LMFTs and LPCs can now enroll to be a Medicare provider and upon approval may bill Medicare for eligible services beginning January 1, 2024.
- See AAMFT's information about Medicare enrollment [here](#) if you are interested in enrolling.
- LMFTs and LPCs who do not wish to enroll in Medicare must still intentionally OPT OUT of Medicare for a mandatory 2-year period that is automatically renewed.
- Opting out of Medicare could potentially violate some insurance contracts, so consult relevant insurance companies before choosing to opt out.
- Failing to either enroll or opt out of Medicare could result in penalties if eligible clients are seen in therapy.
- More information about opting out in Texas can be found [here](#).
- Clinicians in other states will need to submit an affidavit to the Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) for their state. Consult [this site](#) to find the MAC in your state.
- Clinicians in Texas can submit [this affidavit form](#) to opt out.

TAMFT will continue to monitor LMFT inclusion in Medicare and inform members as needed. Thank you for your patience with these new developments, and we hope you have a wonderful 2024.

Sincerely,
TAMFT Board of Directors
Jason Martin, President

STUDENT CORNER



TSAMFT BOARD UPDATE

Members: Jaida Pryor, President; Emily Esail, Secretary; Melinda Barsales, Treasurer; Crystal Lina Lopez, Social Media Manager; Sydney Jeffrey, Outreach Manager

The past few months have been flown by! Our focus this year has been on providing opportunities for students to connect with one another and we are so excited at how things have been going so far. Here is what we have been up to and what you can expect to be on the lookout for in the spring!

We welcomed our newly-elected TSAMFT Board President-Elect, Lizee Love! Lizee joins us as a master's student from Texas Woman's University and is excited to begin her tenure as TSAMFT president beginning in April after the annual TAMFT conference. We are so excited to have her! Welcome, Lizee!

In regard to programming, the TSAMFT board and student volunteers have been working so hard to bring the students of TAMFT an opportunity to connect and to strengthen their craft. We have had three Peer-to-Peer meetings, and they have been a hit! October was an introduction to the program overall, November was focused on MFT National Examination Test Prep, and December was all about self-care! Thank you to everyone who was able to join us and we are looking forward to connecting with those who plan to join in the future!

Here is a list of programs that we have scheduled to happen starting in January:

- 9:00 AM, January 20th: TSAMFT Open Board Meeting
- 10:00 AM, February 3rd: Becoming an Associate: Let's Chat
- 10:00 AM, March 2nd: National Exam Study Group
- 9:00 AM, March 16th: TSAMFT Open Board Meeting
- 10:00 AM, April 6th: The Future of MFT: What type of career do you want with an MFT identity?

Please feel free to email jpryor@twu.edu if you are interested in joining a meeting!



Marriage and Family Therapy National Exam Prep

TAMFT has put together a suite of resources to help students prepare for the national licensure exam, including recordings of our Exam Prep Workshop, a Practice Exam & Answer Explanations, and an MFT Terms Glossary.



SIGN UP TODAY

ONLINE COURSES

**CONTINUING
EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES**

**TAMFT OFFERS A
WIDE VARIETY OF
ONLINE
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CEUs.**

**CHECK THEM OUT
HERE.**



UPCOMING LIVE WEBINARS:

TAMFT Legislative Engagement – Shaping Our Future

1 ETHICS CEU



January 19, 2024 | 12-1pm CT | Live Via



Tristan "Tris" Castañeda Jr.

TAMFT Board Townhall



January 19, 2024 | 1-2pm CT | Live Via



**Have Questions for the Board?
Join Us!**