

# **Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board**

## **Testimony on House Bill 49, FY 2018-2019 Biennial Budget Health and Human Services Subcommittee of the Ohio House Finance Committee**

February 23, 2017

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes, members of the Subcommittee, I am Amanda Ferguson, Executive Director of the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

### **Introduction**

The Chemical Dependency Professionals Board provides licensing and certification services to approximately 9,700 alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention professionals.

The Board's mission is to cultivate, certify and license quality prevention and addiction professionals. Its vision is a network of competent, ethical professionals practicing evidence-informed services that promote healthy lifestyles and communities.

The Board accomplishes its mission and vision by:

- establishing and maintaining standards for those who seek a license or certification
- guiding practice through policy, education and the enforcement of ethical standards
- providing oversight and monitoring of continuing education activities
- overseeing the administration of professional examinations
- engaging with state-wide, national and international organizations to ensure Ohio continues to be a leader in the credentialing of alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention professionals

### **Board & Committee Members**

Organizationally, the Board is comprised of thirteen members. Twelve members are appointed by the Governor and consist of seven alcohol and other drug treatment professionals holding a chemical dependency counselor license, two professionals holding the prevention specialist certification, one medical doctor with experience practicing in a field related to chemical dependency counseling and two public members. The Director of OhioMHAS is authorized to appoint one ex officio member to the Board.

Board members provide a wealth of knowledge and varying perspectives based on level of licensure, practice setting, geography and area of expertise. They do so not for the compensation they receive but out of a desire to serve and improve their profession. In FY2016, annual Board member compensation was roughly \$1,300 per board member representing one of the smallest line items in the Board's budget.

In addition to its thirteen board members, the Board currently has three standing committees (Treatment, Prevention and Education) each comprised of 8-12 volunteer members. These individuals provide policy recommendations and present the pulse of licensees and certificate holders to the Board on a quarterly basis. The Board believes it is these varying voices which have led to the successful education, policy and licensing decisions it has made over the years. The Board values the time and input these professionals bring to the table and has seen many volunteer committee members successfully move on to become board members and continue to serve the profession.

## **Board Operations**

The Board currently employs 4.5 FTE: an Executive Director, Treatment Credentialing Administrator, two Credentialing Coordinators and an Office Assistant. The Board also utilizes a personal services contract to engage a part time ethics investigator. Staff are charged with the review and processing of all new applications, renewals, inactive status requests, exam results, continuing education approvals, audits, public records requests and ethics complaints. Staff provide technical expertise and knowledge to the professionals in the field, allowing them to move efficiently through the licensing process. Thoroughness of application reviews and timeliness of staff responses are all a part of the quality customer service the Board values and expects.

In August of 2016, the Board transitioned to the state's new eLicense system. This new system has created several efficiencies that have greatly benefited both staff and licensees. Among these are:

- Online renewal applications which are processed instantly versus within 7-10 days under the old system
- Immediate electronic receipt of licensing documentation upon approval versus receipt of mailed documentation within 3-5 days
- Online accounts for each licensee which allows them to make address changes and submit name changes electronically
- Online applications which allow applicants to enter and upload all application information electronically thereby reducing mail and payment processing by staff

These efficiencies could not have come at a more opportune time. Over the last three fiscal years the number of active licensees the Board serves has grown 22.4% from 7,928 in FY2014 to 9,705 in FY2016. Additionally, the number of new applications we process has grown by 60% from 2,009 in FY2014 to 3,133 in FY2016. The Board was reaching the point where it would need to either hire additional staff or extend its processing times. The efficiencies created by the new eLicense system has allowed the Board to contain payroll costs and continue to review and process applications without increasing processing times.

New application reviews require staff not only to verify completion of application documentation but also to analyze educational content, job duties and supervisory sign offs and determine if these submissions comply with Ohio Administrative Code requirements. Application reviews take both staff time and knowledge to process successfully and many applications do not meet requirements upon submission. Staff work with applicants sometimes for several weeks or even months to assist them in achieving licensure. And

while the new eLicense system has afforded staff several areas of efficiencies, it has also created the need for staff to provide ongoing technical assistance and support as applicants work to navigate an online system that is unfamiliar to them.

## **Budget**

The Board is a fee based entity and does not receive or use General Revenue Funds. Specifically, the Board is part of the 4K9 Fund group. This fund serves as a repository for fees collected by Ohio's professional and occupational licensing boards.

The Executive Budget, as proposed, allots the Board \$337,200 in FY 2018 and \$0 in FY 2019. The Executive Budget proposes the merger of the Board with the Counselor, Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapy Board and the Psychology Board into a new State Behavioral Health & Social Work Board. The merger would be effective 1/21/18. The Executive Budget provides the Board with adequate funds to operate until the merger takes effect. Board revenues will provide the dollars necessary to support the executive proposal for the Board.

In the new combined Board, the professionals currently licensed and certified by our Board will be represented by two Board Members: one prevention professional and one chemical dependency counselor. The Board encourages, during this merger process, the consideration of approaches that will ensure a successful transition of institutional knowledge and an adequate representation of the wide variety of professionals we license and certify. The Board believes it is vital that the new combined Board has appropriately functioning committee structures to meet this goal.

The Board fully appreciates efforts to create office efficiencies and cost savings while maintaining a structure that will ensure the needed perspectives to enact sound policy and provide high quality services. If you asked the professionals we serve what they most value about the Board, I believe they would tell you they value most the ease with which they can access helpful, knowledgeable staff and the responsiveness of the Board to the listen to their concerns and adapt to the changing needs of the profession. It is our hope that the new combined Board would embrace and maintain this legacy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be glad to respond to any questions you may have at this time.