



Counselor, Social Worker & Marriage and Family Therapist Board

77 South High Street, 24th Floor, Room 2468
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6171
614-466-0912 & Fax 614-728-7790
<http://cswmft.ohio.gov> & cswmft.info@cswb.ohio.gov

Budget Testimony before the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources

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Chairman Hoops, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources, I'm Brian Carnahan, Executive Director of the Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board.

Thank you on behalf of the Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board (CSWMFT Board) for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony and address any questions you may have.

Overview of Board:

The mission of the CSWMFT Board is to protect the citizens of the State of Ohio from unqualified and incompetent Counselors, Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists. The Board accomplishes this mission through a 15-member board composed of licensed professionals and public members that establishes the requirements for minimal competency for entry into three separate but related licensed professions numbering nearly 40,000 professionals. These licensees are working in a broad range of settings including schools, hospitals, mental health agencies, and private practice settings. They provide services and assistance to those dealing with addiction, mental and emotional disorders, or simply challenges navigating the difficulties of life. You or your family have likely been assisted in some capacity by a licensee of the CSWMFT Board. CSW establishes and enforces practice standards and codes of conduct. The Board has the statutory authority to grant licenses and registrations; it oversees the administration of professional examinations through vendor partners. To ensure appropriate continuing competence, in addition to authorizing certain associations to act on its behalf, the Board pre-approves continuing education programs and providers necessary for meeting continuing education requirements. The

Board investigates violations of the laws and rules governing the practice of Counseling, Social Work, and Marriage and Family Therapy. If a licensee or registrant is found to have violated the laws and rules, appropriate action is taken by the Board to address the violation and ensure the public is protected.

The Board is supported by a staff of thirteen full time employees, all of whom fulfill critical public protection and customer service roles.

In the last biennium, the Board:

- Completed implementation of eLicense, a robust, system that supports application submission and review, license renewals, and complaint processing.
- Integrated CE Broker into our continuing education process. This will create processing efficiencies for the board but also help licensees find available programs.
- Implemented an online evaluation form, eliminating a paper form. This has saved time for applicants and Board staff.
- Worked with the General Assembly and association partners to make a change in Counselor education program accreditation. This change will allow for the establishment of counselor education programs at two Ohio colleges, while providing an opportunity for other colleges to create new programs.
- Revised rules to provide guidance to support teletherapy/telehealth; revised certain rules to facilitate the use of technology.
- Established strategic planning work groups to explore how to support license portability/mobility, board functioning, on-boarding of new Board Members, and licensee training supervision.
- Wrote and implemented a temporary permission to practice rule that has helped ensure persons moving to Ohio can transition with appropriate service. This rule is giving us experience in handling licensure mobility/portability issues.
- Extended our reciprocity agreement with KY Counseling Board.
- Provided training through webinars and in-person training.
- Enhanced communication with licensees and stakeholders through the Board's web site, newsletters, and social media.

The Board's proposed budget does include funds to cover some cost increases, as well as a proposed increase in staffing of one full time equivalent employee. The Board has experienced an increase in the cost of its licensing system. It is important to note the new system, eLicense, replaces an aging legacy system. eLicense ensures the Board is using current technology. This offers several important benefits: it enhances our ability to process work in an increasingly paperless environment; facilitates communication with licensees; provides licensees and applicants with a user-friendly means of applying for and maintaining their licenses, and most importantly, ensures we are securely storing user data.

Payroll and health care also account for part of the increase in the Board's requested budget.

During the current biennium we have seen a significant increase in complaints. For some perspective in fiscal years 2015, 2016 and 2017 we received approximately 280 complaints. In FY 2018 366 complaints were submitted to the Board. Based on the current caseload, and the pace of submissions, the Board is on track to receive approximately 580 complaints. We do not think the increase in complaints necessarily results from increased violations on the part of licensees, rather we think the online complaint form available as part of the eLicense system, has expanded access. Formerly the Board relied upon a hard copy form. No matter the reason for the increase, the Board is committed to thoroughly reviewing and investigating all complaints, while also working closely with licensees and stakeholders to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and training to avoid violating the laws and rules.

Recommended Budget:

The Board is self-sufficient. The Board's revenues result from licensing and renewal fees; revenue is more than enough to cover operating costs. The Board does not receive any general revenue funds (GRF).

The proposed budget recommends funding of \$1,740,000 in fiscal year 2020, and funding of \$1,855,000 in fiscal year 2021. The proposed funding for this biennium will allow the Board to continue its critical public protection work while providing an opportunity to increase its investigative staff by one staff member. As noted earlier in my testimony, the Board is experiencing an increasing caseload of complaints, some of which can be complicated to investigate. The additional investigator will ensure that complaints are processed timely, while also enabling the investigators to respond to licensee and public inquiries.

House Bill 166 includes necessary changes to Ohio Revised Code 4757 that will positively impact the Board's budget. It expands counselor endorsement language to facilitate licensing persons in Ohio who are licensed in other states but have non-conforming degrees. Applications from such persons increase the Board's processing costs and often result in hearings, which impact the Board's budget. The bill also expands acceptable accredited degrees for Counselor licensure, reduces Social Work Assistant continuing education requirements, and gives the Board authority to consider a rule to set renewal dates on a basis other than issuance date. The proposed changes will help the Board ensure qualified professionals are able to be licensed and begin serving Ohioans. The proposed changes to ORC 4757 were included in House Bill 523, sponsored by Representatives Lanese and Perales, which passed overwhelmingly in the House during the 132 General Assembly. The changes were supported by the professional associations representing the Board's licensees.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I look forward to addressing your questions regarding the Board's critical public protection role.