

**House Health Committee**

Testimony of Stephanie M. Loucka, Executive Director, State Medical Board of Ohio  
February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about Governor DeWine's Executive Budget and about the State Medical Board's ("SMBO" or "the Board") budget initiatives for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. This proposal requires no funding from Ohio's general revenue funds (GRF) and focuses on enhancing public safety and promoting effective management of personnel. The request is designed to ensure the SMBO's role in protecting the public and supporting our licensees.

It is the SMBO's mission to protect and enhance the health and safety of the public through effective medical regulation. The Board accomplishes this through its authority to license, regulate and discipline Ohio's physicians, physician assistants, massage therapists and other allied healthcare professionals. The Board's goals aim to:

- Prohibit people from practicing medicine whose violations are so egregious as to forfeit the privilege.
- Ensure people practicing medicine meet sufficient standards of education, training, competence, and ethics.
- Define and advocate for standards of safe medical practice.
- Provide the public information about the licensees of the Board, the Board's functions and operations, and the laws governing the practice of medicine.
- Achieve and maintain the highest possible levels of organizational efficacy.

The SMBO licenses and regulates 13 different license types, totaling about 100,000 licensed medical professionals. This represents a growth in licensing volume of roughly 7 percent in the past five years, and 37 percent in the past decade. We currently have 85 employees on staff and the proposed budget authorizes the Board to fill current vacancies and employ up to 88 positions. We have not raised licensing fees in more than 2 decades.

In 2024, the Board received 6,188 complaints and closed 6,479 complaints. The Board issued 247 formal actions in 2024, including, among other actions, 52 revocations, 37 suspensions and 33 reprimands. The primary complaint type received by the SMBO is for standard of care violations. As complaints become more complex, achieving and maintaining proper staffing levels will be critical over the next biennium.

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## **State Medical Board of Ohio: Current Biennium Focus**

The SMBO has committed significant resources this biennium to the implementation of new pathways to licensure. Since the enactment of the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact (IMLC) in FY23, we have granted more than 2,500 compact licenses for out of state physicians to practice in Ohio. In addition to work on the IMLC, Ohio chairs the rulemaking process for the Physician Assistant Compact Commission and participating in the launch of the Compact. The Board will soon begin the implementation process for the Massage Therapy and Dietetics Compacts, respectively. Additionally, since the passage of Senate Bill 131 of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, the SMBO has implemented a process for and granted approximately 1,100 reciprocity licenses. While necessitating change to both customer service and process work at the SMBO, these new pathways to licensure have offered our licensees a valuable service in making Ohio welcoming to potential practitioners.

The Board is working to implement Senate Bill 109 of the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The SMBO is the only Board in the country with a team dedicated to sexual misconduct complaints. Senate Bill 109 gives the Board more tools to hold licensees who commit sexual misconduct accountable; it increases reporting requirements, allows for authorization of summary suspension upon criminal indictment, and adds transparency for complainants and patients. We appreciate the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's unanimous passage of this important legislation. Of note, because of our continuing work in combatting sexual misconduct, the SMBO received the 2024 Best of Boards Award by the Federation of State Medical Boards.

The SMBO also continues to work closely with the Ohio Professionals Health Program (OhioPHP) on the implementation of a new confidential monitoring program for licensees who may have substance use, mental health, or physical impairments. The Board wants to ensure that licensees can seek help confidentially. The confidentiality of the impairment remains in the control of the licensee; if they comply with the confidential monitoring program requirements, the Board is assured that the public is protected. The work of the new program involves staff from all areas of the Board and continues to be managed by our Quality Intervention team. The OhioPHP monitors approximately 300 licensees for the Board.

## **State Medical Board of Ohio: Looking Forward**

With the operationalization of the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact (IMLC), the Board has seen an influx of licensees due to the opportunity for practitioners to practice across state lines through telehealth. This not only increases our licensee count for purposes of investigations and enforcement activity but also adds a new policy responsibility for our legal and licensure teams. With the additional passage of the Physician Assistant Compact, the Interstate Massage Compact, and the Dietetics Compact, and the drafting process beginning for the Respiratory Care Interstate Compact and the Podiatric Compact, the Board will continue to invest resources to implement the compacts and to ensure compliance with the new statutes. All compacts are unique and have complex laws and rules for compliance. The compacts require operations that are very different from the Board's automated and streamlined licensure processes and introduce new disciplinary processes.

Over the next biennium, we will continue to sharpen our focus on the efficient but qualitative resolution of complaints. Over the last two years, the Board's Medical Director has helped to greatly shrink the time for review of standard of care complaints; we are able to provide a more thorough analysis and provide constituents with quicker answers. In the coming years, we will focus on efficiencies for the complaints that are moving forward to enforcement, both bringing cases or settlements sooner and moving things to adjudication in a timelier manner. We want to ensure that the citizens of Ohio have both certainty and confidence in the Board's protection of the public.

As mentioned above, the SMBO is working to implement Senate Bill 109 from the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The rollout of this comprehensive legislative package needs to reach not only our licensees, but also health care facilities and certain law enforcement officials. We will provide training and regular updates as the law becomes effective and operationalized. We will also work to inform the public of the new patient protections provided in the bill. Finally, we will update internal processes to incorporate the new tools that have been provided in the bill.

The SMBO serves a critical role in the relationship an Ohio citizen has with their healthcare provider. We must be as transparent as possible about our work, while maintaining the required confidentiality. While we often can't comment to the public about ongoing case matters, we can offer reassurance about our work through public information campaigns and deidentified data. Our outreach efforts in FY25 and 26 will focus on reaching a wider population of Ohioans. Too often we hear that individuals don't understand the work of the Board or don't know that they can file a complaint with us. Building on our social media presence, the SMBO intends to advertise more globally at large public forums such as the Ohio State Fair. We will continue the development of our podcast, *Med Board Pulse*, an educational podcast for the public. Also, we will deliver a specific podcast series for our licensees to keep them informed on the Board's priorities.

## **Conclusion**

The proposed operating budget includes \$14,315,005 in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$14,891,225 in Fiscal Year 2027. This budget allows us to continue to meet the needs of our licensees and continue protections for the citizens of Ohio. The Board's projected revenue supports these requests, without any impact on the general revenue fund and without raising licensure fees at this time.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak to you today. I will gladly answer any questions you have at this time.