



Ohio Counselor, Social Worker & Marriage and Family Therapist Board

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

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Chairman Kick, Ranking Member O'Brien, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources, I am 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 42,000 licensees and registrants. You or your family have likely been assisted in some capacity by a licensee of the CSWMFT Board. Board licensees are working in a broad range of settings including schools, hospitals, nursing homes, 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.

CSWMFT 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, the Board pre-approves continuing education programs and providers necessary for meeting continuing education requirements. The Board also 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.

A staff of fourteen full time employees supports the Board. All staff provide customer service. Inquiries involving ethics questions and requests for application and renewal assistance remain high. These inquiries have been driven by growth in the professions licensed, as well as the increasing complexity of the issues faced by licensees. These questions can involve significant staff time to navigate.

The Board has met the challenges of the pandemic without sacrificing services. While working remotely staff have been able to issue licenses, assist with renewals, process continuing education requests, and investigate complaints. In response to the pandemic the Board worked with Governor DeWine's office to issue an emergency rule modifying the Board's existing teletherapy rule. Changes to this rule were then adopted that allow for flexibility until the end of the pandemic. These changes ensured clients would continue to have access to important services. An existing rule, allowing the Board to issue temporary permission to practice in certain situations, was used to ensure continuity of care for persons moving back to Ohio because of the pandemic. This was particularly helpful in the spring of 2020 when many college students returned home.

Additionally, the Board has worked to manage the impacts of the two license renewal extensions passed into law - HB 197 and HB 404. The Board does not have a set schedule of renewals. Licensees renew based on the issue date of their license. The extensions have presented some communication challenges with licensees and increased customer service demands as they adapted to the temporary change. The extensions have also impacted when revenue will be received by the Board.

While the pandemic posed some challenges, the Board implemented or continued several operational changes in FY 2020 and FY 2021 that will impact future costs and operations. Additional goals and priorities were met as well. These changes include:

- A change to eLicense to allow hours of supervision to be submitted in eLicense.
- Authorized staff to review certain application issues, saving processing time.
- Significant enhancement of the Board's website, including moving the website to the IOP.

- Filing of a rule in response to Senate Bill 7 and working with other Boards to implement an enterprise solution for license issuance.
- Revision of the Board's new Board Member training.
- Developed and implemented a policy to clarify and enhance how complaints resulting from sexual offenses are handled by the Board.
- Increased the investigations team by one investigator to help with the significant increase in complaints.
- Continuing education audits were completed for over 1100 licensees.
- Over 1000 licensees received ethics training from the Board in-person and online.
- 4700 requests for approval of completed continuing education courses were reviewed.

The Board is focusing on the following goals which will continue into the next biennium:

- Maximizing use of the new eLicense system through rule and procedure changes, for example considering whether out of state license verifications prepared by other state boards can be eliminated in favor of online verifications.
- Developing consistency between Professional Standards Committees to ensure effective communication and enforcement of licensure requirements.
- Decreasing processing time for license issuance and renewal.
- Increasing consumer and licensee awareness of the Board's role through use of web-based resources.
- Continuing to address emerging issues such as emotional support animals, teletherapy/e-therapy and license mobility/portability.

The Board is not anticipating a permanent reduction in any operating costs. The Board has experienced an increase in the cost of its licensing system. These costs will continue to rise as the system is maintained and enhanced. It is important to note the new system, eLicense, replaced 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. The Board works closely with DAS and other licensure boards regarding the maintenance and operation of eLicense.

During the current biennium complaints have remained at the increased level experienced in recent years. For some perspective, in fiscal years 2016 and 2017 we received approximately 280 complaints, while we received 366 complaints in FY 18. In FY 19, 580 complaints were filed with the Board. Complaints in FY 20 numbered 476, while in FY 21 we are on track to open 465 cases. 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. 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 \$1,845,658 in fiscal year 2022 (a modest decrease over the FY 21 budget owing to less Board Member travel to Board meetings as well as limited staff travel in-state for investigations), and funding of \$1,907,553 in fiscal year 2023. The increase in FY 23 can be attributed to eLicense costs as well as costs associated with an anticipated return to in-person Board meetings and some in-state travel by investigators. The proposed funding for this biennium will allow the Board to continue its critical public protection work. As noted earlier in my testimony, the Board continues to experience a heavy caseload of complaints, some of which can be complicated to investigate, requiring significant staff and Board Member time. Additionally, customer service demands are quite significant.

The proposed budget bill includes a proposed change to Ohio Revised Code 4757.10 that will ensure the continuation of services for clients. The recommend change will allow registered trainees (master's level students) to retain their registration, and thus ability to work in the field, for up to six months following graduation. This will provide sufficient time to complete the licensure process.

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