

TEXAS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING
SUMMARY OF MINUTES
July 28, 2020

Chair Gloria Canseco called the meeting of the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council to order at 11:31 a.m.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved to item 2, Roll Call and Certification of Quorum. Chair Gloria Canseco and Council members Sarah Abraham, John Bielamowicz, Steve Christopherson, Dr. Susan Fletcher, George Francis, Ben Morris, and Jennifer Smothermon were present. Timothy Brown was absent. A quorum was seated.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved item 3, Public Comment to the end of the meeting.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved to item 4, Report from Executive Director on proposed plan to address each of the following: (a) Revising the application/licensing process to avoid future backlogs; (b) Addressing the current backlog of social work licensing applications; and (c) Planning for a possible second round of stay-at-home orders resulting from a resurgence of COVID-19.

Executive Director Darrel Spinks provided background information and an overview of the draft proposed plan. Executive Director Spinks reminded the Council that at the last meeting Timothy Brown, Chair of the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners, raised a concern regarding the current licensing backlog at the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. At the Council's direction, Executive Director Spinks drafted a plan to address three areas of concern. Executive Director Spinks worked with the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)-PLCU staff to develop the draft plan that identifies significant problems, contributing factors, and possible solutions. Executive Director Spinks explained that the draft plan provided to the Council is a high-level plan and a living document.

Executive Director Spinks provided information and answered questions regarding revising the application/licensing process to avoid future backlogs (item 4a) and addressing the current backlog of social work licensing applications (item 4b). Regarding avoiding future backlogs, Executive Director Spinks discussed a possible option to outsource the licensing processes going forward and stated that there will be a presentation from ASWB later in the meeting. Executive Director Spinks also discussed staffing issues and streamlined licensing processes if an outsourcing option is not used by TBHEC. Executive Director Spinks answered questions from Council member Jennifer Smothermon regarding the hiring of staff at TBHEC and possible budget cuts. Executive Director Spinks stated he had not received the instructions yet for the Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR), but he cautioned the Council regarding anticipated reductions in appropriations.

Regarding the current backlog with the social work licensing applications, Executive Director Spinks explained that the Council is limited in the actions it can take to address the current backlog at this time, since it lacks authority prior to the transition. Executive Director Spinks noted the actions taken with the HHSC-PLCU staff to address the current backlog, HHSC has authorized the use of temporary employees to assist staff, authorized weekend overtime, and eased restrictions on office access due to COVID-19 in order to address the current backlog. Executive Director

Spinks answered questions from Council member Sarah Abraham regarding the status of these steps and whether there have been any improvements. Executive Director Spinks provided licensing information from the HHSC-PLCU staff to the Council showing that the current backlog has been reduced since the last Council meeting in June 2020. Executive Director Spinks anticipates that if the HHSC-PLCU staff continue to work at the current rate, barring any unexpected events, they will be able to reduce or eliminate the current backlog by the time of transition on September 1, 2020. Executive Director Spinks answered questions from Council member George Francis about what steps are being taken to change the process to address the backlog, and he noted the upcoming presentation by ASWB.

Executive Director Spinks provided information and answered questions regarding planning for a possible second round of stay-at-home orders resulting from a resurgence of COVID-19 (item 4c). Executive Director Spinks reported that Council staff will be equipped with laptops and outbound servers and storage, and that staff will maximize their ability to work from home through a cloud-based file system and VPN access. Executive Director Spinks explained the efforts of the HHSC-PLCU staff in developing processes and a system for handling licensing applications remotely, and he addressed handling enforcement cases remotely. Executive Director Spinks also stated the ability to work remotely is a job perk for new hires and staff retention. Executive Director Spinks answered questions from Council member George Francis on the obstacles to working from home and on the steps being taken to move away from a paper driven application process. Executive Director Spinks expressed the need for a completely online licensing application system that will allow work to continue while working from home. Executive Director Spinks reported that staff have started working with the database staff to move away from paper applications and to maximize the use of the licensing database; however, the focus and efforts to move toward a completely online licensing application system will be in the Spring of next year, after the Council becomes operational on September 1, 2020. The Council discussed communication and outreach plans regarding the current and future online licensing processes. Executive Director Spinks addressed questions from Council member John Bielamowicz regarding the physical office space for the Council staff in the short-term prior to moving to the new, permanent location.

Council member Timothy Brown joined the meeting.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved to item 5, Presentation from ASWB on processing applications for examination approval through the ASWB licensing portal. Executive Director Darrel Spinks introduced Dave Ryczko of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). Mr. Ryczko introduced members of his team and outlined the ASWB proposed solution to address the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners backlog and timeline to get the program up and running if approved. Robert Adach of ASWB shared some of the features and functions of the software from the applicant user's experience and from the staff application processing experience. Mr. Adach pointed out safety features and system encryption of social security numbers, log-in tracking, and secure payment processing. Mr. Adach highlighted the ability for configuration of the system to the Council's needs.

ASWB representatives Dave Ryczko, Robert Adach, and Jennifer Henkel answered questions from Council members during the presentation. Council member George Francis asked questions regarding customer service response times. Council member Ben Morris asked questions regarding the cost of the service; the use of funds for the services; and ASWB's ability to provide staff and services if additional states are added. Council member George Francis asked questions regarding

the system's speed; the load capacity for internal and external customers; the upload speeds and abilities; the system's reporting processes and abilities, including the ability to configure by user; and the use of artificial intelligence and the system's ability to notify staff and applicants along the process to keep the application moving forward. Chair Gloria Canseco asked questions about configuring the system to require certain information be submitted before proceeding through the application process.

Council member George Francis asked questions about price points based on the number of applications submitted, and Mr. Dave Ryczko responded that the fee is \$60 per application regardless of the number of applications processed. Council member George Francis requested that Executive Director Spinks provide a cost comparison of ASWB's cost to the Council's current cost. Executive Director Spinks asked questions regarding ASWB's fees based on the type of functions transferred to ASWB. Mr. Dave Ryczko explained that ASWB's fees increase from \$60 to \$100 per customer based on the level of services to be provided.

Executive Director Spinks requested direction from the Council regarding exploring moving forward with the ASWB's contract. Council member George Francis asked questions regarding the contract term. Ms. Jennifer Henkel discussed contract processes and terms with other states and the flexibility in determining the contract term and renewal options with the Council. She stated that the minimum contract period would be a one-year contract due to the programming and configuration of the system. Mr. Dave Ryczko provided the contract terms and renewal provisions for other states and recommended at least a three-year contract based on the efforts needed for programming. Chair Gloria Canseco asked how long it would take to set up the system and start operations. Mr. Ryczko responded that it would be two to three months after signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and receiving specifications from the Council. Executive Director Spinks anticipated the time period may be longer since rule changes may be needed.

Executive Director Spinks recommended that this matter be referred to the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (TSBSWE) before the Council makes a decision. This matter could be added to the TSBSWE agenda for its September 11, 2020 meeting.

Council member Ben Morris expressed concerns regarding a potential conflict of interest or at least the appearance of a conflict involving contracts and a person holding a position with the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council, the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners, and the Association of Social Work Boards. Council member Timothy Brown disclosed that he is on the Board of Directors of the ASWB and is in the last year of his four-year term as President. Council member Timothy Brown also discussed his previous disclosures regarding his role and involvement with ASWB. Council member Timothy Brown confirmed that the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners is a member of the ASWB, the ASWB is made up of social work licensing boards in North America, and the ASWB Board of Directors is comprised of persons who serve on the member licensing boards. Council member Timothy Brown thanked the Council and staff for exploring ways to reduce the backlog of social work license applications, and he stated that there is no pressure from him to use ASWB in addressing the backlog. Council member George Francis suggested that Executive Director Spinks explore other options to compare license processing systems.

Executive Director Spinks will research other license processing systems and will bring his findings to the Council along with the Council's costs of processing licensing applications. The Council members offered comments on the length of a contract term; the importance of providing updates on the Council website regarding this process; the long-term goal to have a unified license processing system for all programs; the importance of obtaining input from the TSBSWE; the need for expediency in eliminating the backlog; and the quality of the product presented today. The Council agreed that this matter will come back to the Council for consideration at the first Council meeting following the TSBSWE meeting on September 11, 2020.

Executive Director Spinks stated that he would update the draft proposed plan under item 4 to include additional information on preparing for future changes to the online licensing processes. Executive Director Spinks will have the updated plan approved by Chair Gloria Canseco and then post it to the Council website.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved to item 6, Discussion regarding exceptional items to be included in 2022-23 Legislative Appropriations Request. Executive Director Darrel Spinks reported that he had not received the instructions yet for the Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR). He informed the Council that the exceptional items to be included in the LAR would be requesting any required budget cuts to the baseline funding be returned; asking for a temporary Administrative Assistant position to be made permanent; and seeking money for office furniture and chairs and for information technology cabling and set-up in the new, permanent office. Council member Dr. Susan Fletcher asked questions about the technology available for holding future Council meetings. Council member John Bielamowicz supported any reasonable efforts to make the meetings more accessible to the public. Council member Jennifer Smothermon left the meeting during this agenda item.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved to item 3, Public Comments. There was no public comment.

Chair Gloria Canseco moved to item 7, Adjournment. Chair Canseco adjourned the meeting at 1:32 p.m.