

Date: February 16, 2021
To: Rep. Peter Fischer, Chair & House Behavioral Health Policy Division
From: Kate Zacher-Pate, LSW, Executive Director MN Board of Social Work

Comments on HF 970 – As Introduced

Introduction

I am writing regarding [HF 970](#), to provide comment as the Executive Director of the Board of Social Work (BOSW). Given the recent introduction of HF 970, the Board has not yet had the opportunity to review HF 970 and take a formal position as a body.

BOSW Mission

The Board's mission is protecting the public by regulating the practice of social work, and currently over 16,000 licensees in Minnesota. The BOSW supports and values a diverse and culturally responsive workforce, and the overall intent of HF 970.

Comments by Section

HF 970 includes policy and fiscal impact to the BOSW. The BOSW would welcome further vetting of the proposals from a regulatory perspective. From a public policy perspective, the limited scope of HF 970 touches a very limited portion of licensed health professionals that serve Minnesotans.

The sections that directly impact the BOSW, including sections 9, 12, 13, 14, will cause fiscal impact and policy changes, not initiated by the Board, to our BOSW Practice Act, MS 148E.

- Section 9 requires mandatory continuing education (CE) hours in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) content, which directly impacts the BOSW and licensees.
- Sections 12, 13, and 14 create Department of Human Services (DHS) convened task forces on important issues which require board participation.

There are several provisions not within the BOSW authority which would have positive impact on the mental health workforce. The BOSW recognizes the merit of these provisions and adds no further comment to those sections.

Section 9: Amendment to MS 148E.130, BOSW Continuing Education (CE) Hour Requirement

- The BOSW agrees that education about racism, which is immersed in the social work academic curriculum, is vital to creating positive change in our communities and in the practices and responsiveness of licensed professionals. Even though not mandated by law at this time, the BOSW encourages and supports trainings about racism, discriminatory practices, cultural awareness, social diversity, culturally informed practices, communities of color, and indigenous communities.
- Policy Impact of Proposal:
 - This proposal amends the BOSW Practice Act MS 148E, without Board approval.
 - The proposal requires six continuing education (CE) hours in content *“increasing the knowledge, understanding, self-awareness, and practice skills that enable a social worker to serve clients from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds”* at each license renewal for all licensees.

- The BOSW requires two CE hours in social work ethics at each license renewal and intentionally amended the definition of [continuing education social work ethics](#) (MS 148E.010, subd 7e) in the 2020 Legislative Session to include “*the history and evolution of values and ethics in social work, including cultural awareness and social diversity*”, to recognize the importance of DEI training.
- The BOSW intentionally adjusted the number of CE hours required in specific content areas, in the 2020 Legislative Session, to be responsive to stakeholder concerns that prescriptive CE did not allow providers the opportunity to develop their own professional training needs.
- Fiscal Impact of Proposal:
 - Mandating additional content areas result in more prescriptive regulation and increased cost for licensees, which is a common concern reported to the BOSW by licensees.
 - Mandating this change to MS 148E will cause fiscal impact to the BOSW requiring technical programming changes to the licensing data base, notifications to licensees, and efforts to ensure compliance with this requirement.

Section 10: Amendment to MS 245.462, subd 17, Mental Health Practitioner

- Do the suggested changes to the Mental Health Practitioner designation in HF 970 align with the recently introduced [DHS Change Item Summary - Mental Health Uniform Service Standards](#).

Section 12: Culturally Informed and Culturally Responsive Mental Health Task Force

- Fiscal impact for agency to participate on task force.
- Concern with composition of membership, with only two members identified as mental health providers who are members of communities of color or underrepresented communities.

Section 13: Direction to Commissioners; Alternative Mental Health Professional Licensing Pathways Work Group

- Fiscal impact for agency to participate on task force.
- Should this provision be enacted, the February 1, 2022, report deadline is not realistic to complete the full scope of the regulatory and policy analysis, and to identify any potential impact and unintended consequences.

Section 14: Direction to Commissioners; Mental Health Professional Licensing Supervision

- Fiscal impact for agency to participate on task force.
- Should this provision be enacted, the February 1, 2022, report deadline is not realistic to complete the full scope of the regulatory and policy analysis, and to identify any potential impact and unintended consequences.

Conclusion

The Board, as a state regulatory agency, has adopted a DEI vision to be guided by a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, commits to actively examine and address systemic inequities in policy and practice and work to reduce unnecessary barriers to social work licensing, while maintaining standards to ensure our mission of protecting the public. Board members and staff value partnerships and commit to continued work with all stakeholders to ensure diversity in the workforce, while licensing qualified, professional, ethical, and accountable social workers.

Contact Information

Thank you for your consideration and attention. The Board welcomes discussion of these important issues.
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