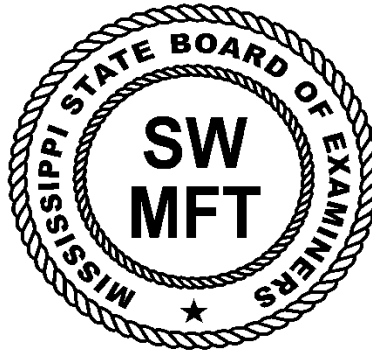


**MISSISSIPPI
BOARD OF EXAMINERS
FOR SOCIAL WORKERS AND MARRIAGE
AND FAMILY THERAPISTS**



**FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR FISCAL YEARS 2024 – 2028**

Mississippi Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists

1. Comprehensive Mission Statement

The mission of the Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists is to ensure that the public is protected from the unprofessional, improper, unauthorized, and unqualified practice of social work and marriage and family therapy by implementing and administering licensure requirements prescribed by law.

2. Philosophy

The philosophy of the Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists is to adhere to the professional standards of exemplary quality of services, innovation, integrity, accountability, respect of our citizens, and teamwork among our staff and board members in protecting the lives of the public we serve.

The Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists is committed to the continual protection of the people of Mississippi by promoting high standards of professional performance for those engaged in the profession of social work and the profession of marriage and family therapy through regulation and by setting standards of qualification, education, training, and experience for those who engage, or seek to engage, in the practice of social work and marriage and family therapy.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal #1: To execute all licensing and regulation related to social work and marriage and family therapy in the State of Mississippi.

Relevant Benchmark #1

- 1) Ensure licensure compliance
- 2) Implement clear standards

Statewide Goal #2: To protect the public's safety, including providing timely and appropriate responses to filed complaints, and the completion of resolving those cases.

Relevant Benchmarks:

- 1) Case clearance rates (the number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases)
- 2) Time to case disposition (percentage of cases disposed within the time standard set for each case type)
- 3) Age of pending case load (number of days from case filing to date of measurement of the pending caseload)
- 4) Average cost of processing a single case, by case type
- 5) Regulatory efficiency: average length of time to resolution of documented complaints to professional licensing agencies

Statewide Goal #3: To create an efficient and convenient system for processing applications, renewals, and other forms/documents through the use of new technology.

Relevant Benchmarks

- 1) Number and average cost of regulatory actions taken, by regulatory body and type of action
- 2) State dollars saved by providing government services online (e.g. document retrieval, issue of new business permits, license renewal)

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Plan

The Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists (Board) has targeted three areas as a priority for the next five years. The Board plans to launch a system to process applications and renewals expediently, and to expand regulatory efforts in order to safeguard public individuals.

The first and second priority is to provide both applicants and licensees with a more expedient and cost-effective process for obtaining and maintaining licensure required to practice in the State of Mississippi. Through joint efforts with the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services (ITS), the Board will provide a new, secure system, Licensing and Reporting System (LARS), which will allow applicants and licensees to transmit applications securely via an online platform. According to ITS' Development Services, "*LARS enables government agencies to provide digital licensing, permitting, inspection, and enforcement services to improve the speed and efficiency of delivery versus traditional licensing processes*". Improving board staff efficiencies with access to relevant and up-to-date technology will be beneficial to both licensees and the public. The impact of the online renewal application continues to be a convenience to licensees by reducing the need for costly certified mail or express mail delivery and reduce the staffing time needed to process a paper renewal. With the implementation of the new online renewal portal in FY 2023, the Board sees an opportunity for an increase in other online functionality for FY 2024 and FY 2025 such as an accessible online database that allows licensees to log-in and make changes to selected information such as updating addresses, inputting continuing education, as well as a secure payment portal to process documents such as name change requests, out-of-state verification requests, and duplicate certificate requests. This system will also allow new applicants to have the accessibility of electronic application submission, thus increasing processing time for licensure.

During FY 2025 and 2026, the Board will research methods to determine if the online system aids in the increase or reduction of the number of licensees who renew their license through LARS. In response to the outcome, the Board will use this data to implement needed programs if a reduction in the number of licenses become lapsed.

Our agency has been inundated with the issue of securing staff to accommodate the growing number of applicants. During FY 2024, it is our goal to hire a contracted part-time worker to assist in the general day-to-day office duties. Changes to the current Customer Service Representative II (Licensing Officer) position will be discussed with MSPB and the potential to reclassify the duties of this position with MSPB to determine a more efficient and cost effective strategy for meeting the

demands of licensure with a limited staff. The current assigned duties between the Licensing Officer and the Executive Director will be re-evaluated to offset the need for a third full-time employee. The greatest adjustment will add duties to the Licensing Officer's duties to include assisting the Executive Director with complaints. These duties will be examined by the MSPB and the agency's Board to determine if a position change in title is warranted and if these changes will allow for an increase in the salary of the Licensing Officer at a cost not to exceed \$8,000.

The third priority will be to maximize consumer protection. The current average turnaround time for complaint investigations is two to three years. Our agency experienced one of the largest increase in licensure through reciprocity due to COVID-19. There is a correlation between the amounts of complaints with increasing numbers of licensees. The goal for FY 2024 is to formulate a more efficient system to increase the turnaround time for processing complaints, including investigative work and disciplinary actions. This includes the addition of an investigator to work in conjunction with the assigned Board member. The Board would like to add the investigator during FY 2024 at a cost not to exceed \$10,000. It is estimated that the addition of an investigator would close the three-year processing gap to one-year maximum case completion.

5. Agency's External / Internal Assessment

Since our agency is self-funded, legislative budget constraints are considered each time new or expanded services are requested. The agency will continue to seek ways of efficiency in its licensure process.

External/Internal Factors – Technology Changes

Changes in technology would improve turnaround time for application processing and licensure renewals thus taking the burden off of staff and creating convenience for applicants and licensees. The implementation of LARS will minimize payment issues, lost or delayed mail, and provide accurate application of licensure with minimal mistakes. The new renewal portal will allow licensees to receive their updated license in real time, as soon as the renewal has been processed.

External/Internal Factors – Board Workforce

The impact of COVID-19 and our agency's response to licensure and the negatively impacted workload of staff. With only a staff of two, an assessment is needed to reassign office duties among current staff and add a contracted part-time position to help offset day-to-day office duties such as answering the phone, and processing incoming and outgoing mail. More retirees are re-entering the workforce; therefore, it may prove beneficial to acquire an individual at the part-time level. It has become increasingly difficult to hire qualified individuals as the salaries offered by the private sector outweigh the salaries offered by state government.

External/Internal Factors - State Statutes or Regulations

State law changes have impacted the licensure process for all social work and marriage and family therapy reciprocal applicants. House Bill 1263 was introduced and passed during the FY

2022 Legislative Session implementing a new reciprocal licensure requirement for all Occupational Licensing Boards. The Act created under Section 73-50-2 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 is known as the “Universal Recognition of Occupational Licenses Act”. The Act allows an occupational licensing board to ‘issue a license or government certification in the discipline applied for and at the same practice level to a person who establishes residence in Mississippi’.

6. Agency Goals, Objective, Strategies and Measures by Program for FY 2023 through FY 2027:

Program 1: Licensure

GOAL A: License qualified applicants for social work and marriage and family therapy licensure (Miss. Code Ann. § 73-53-1 and § 73-54-3)

OBJECTIVE A.1. Effectively manage licensure by evaluating applications and issuance of licensure for social workers and marriage and family therapists

Outcome: Number of all licensed social workers licensed to practice in Mississippi

Outcome: Number of all licensed marriage and family therapists and licensed marriage and family therapy associates licensed to practice in Mississippi

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a thorough process of applying for licensure for the purpose of verifying that each applicant meets the requirements for social work and marriage and family therapy licensure in Mississippi

Output: Number of new LSW level social workers

Output: Number of new LMSW level social workers

Output: Number of new LCSW level social workers

Output: Number of new LMFT level marriage and family therapists

Output: Number of new LMFTA level marriage and family therapy associates

Efficiency: Cost of applicable fees for LSW licensees

Efficiency: Cost of applicable fees for LMSW/LCSW licensees

Efficiency: Cost of applicable fees for LMFT licensees

Efficiency: Cost of applicable fees for LMFTA licensees

Explanatory: Number of applications received and staff availability

GOAL B: Ensure public safety and welfare through appropriate regulation of social work and marriage and family therapy licensure (Miss. Code Ann. § 73-53-1 and § 73-54-3)

OBJECTIVE B.1. Enforce rules and regulations regarding the importance of public welfare and licensure compliance

Outcome: Change in the number of complaints received of licensees who violated the laws, statues, rules and regulations governing social work and marriage and family therapy

B.1.1. STRATEGY: Conduct yearly random audits of continuing education for social work and marriage and family therapy licensees

Output: Total number of LSWs who renewed

Output: Total number of LMSW/LCSWs who renewed

Output: Total number of LMFTs who renewed

Efficiency: Percent of LSW licensees selected for the random audit

Efficiency: Percent of LMSW/LCSW licensees selected for the random audit

Efficiency: Percent of LMFT licensees selected for the random audit

Explanatory: Number of social work licensees audited per renewal period divided by 10%

Explanatory: Number of marriage and family therapy licensees audited per renewal period divided by 20%

B.1.2. STRATEGY: Investigate complaints, discipline violators and promote compliance through continuing education to educate licensees on the importance of public protection and licensure compliance

Output: Total number of complaints received

Efficiency: Average time for complaint resolution

Explanatory: Number of jurisdictional complaints received and resolved

GOAL C: Improve the renewal process of social work and marriage and family therapy licensure (Miss. Code Ann. § 73-53-1 and § 73-54-3)

OBJECTIVE C.1. Implement an online renewal system and payment portal

Outcome: Change in the number of social work and marriage and family therapy licensees who utilize the online system

C.1.1. STRATEGY: Migrate paper applications into a fillable online application

Output: Total number of licensees who renew online

Efficiency: Cost of maintaining the online system

Explanatory: Agency budget constraints and availability of ITS staff