

Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors 835-00

**5-Year Strategic Plan
FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2027 – 2031**

Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors 835-00 5-Year Strategic Plan, FY 2027 – FY 2031

1. Our Mission

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors (Board) purpose is to provide for the regulation and practice of counseling as well as the use of the title "Licensed Professional Counselor" and "Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor" to ensure the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the State of Mississippi.

2. Our Philosophy

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors is committed to the continued safeguard of the public health, safety, and welfare of Mississippians. The philosophy of the Board is to adhere to the highest professional standards and to systematically enforce licensing and regulation of any person who presents himself/herself to the public as a Licensed Professional Counselor, Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor, counselor, or psychotherapist who offers professional counseling or psychotherapy services to individuals, groups, organizations, corporation, intuitions, government agencies, or the general public.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal #1.: To protect Mississippians from risks to public health, provide them with the health-related information, and increase access to quality healthcare necessary to increase the length and quality of their lives.

Relevant Benchmarks #1: *Access to Care*

- Number of health professionals in shortage areas
- Number of practitioners needed to remove health professional shortage area designations, by type of practitioner
- Percentage of population lacking access to mental health care
- Percentage of population lacking access to community-based mental health care

Statewide Goal #2.:

To create an efficient government and an informed and engaged citizenry that helps to address social problems through the payment of taxes, the election of capable leaders at all levels of government, and participation in charitable organizations through contributions and volunteerism.

Relevant Benchmarks #1: *Cost of Government*

- Total state spending per capita
- Number of government employees per 10,000 population

Relevant Benchmarks #2.: *Government Efficiency*

- Administrative efficiency: Expenditures on state government administrative activities as a percentage of total operational expenditures
- Average wait time for state government services
- Regulatory efficiency: average length of time to resolution of documented complaints to professional licensing agencies
- Number and average cost of regulatory actions taken, by regulatory body and type of action
- State dollars saved by providing government services online (e.g., document retrieval, issuance of new business permits, license renewal)

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Strategic Plan:

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors targeted priorities for the next five years:

- **LPC-S Training.** The Board recognizes the importance of ongoing training for Board-Qualified Supervisors (LPC-S). In recent years, supervision processes have evolved significantly due to the adoption of online reporting and the introduction of the Provisional-LPC. To ensure LPC-S remain informed and compliant, the Board has offered one-hour Lunch and Learn sessions—accessible to all Mississippi licensees—focusing on supervision requirements, expectations, and process. With the approval of funding for the website redesign and functionality in 2025 and its implementation in FY 2026, the Board will continue to provide accessible training opportunities, both in-person and online. These efforts will help ensure all LPC-S are knowledgeable about current supervision procedures, upcoming changes to Rules and Regulations, and relevant website updates.
- **Licensee Training.** The Board is not tasked with providing continuing education hours for its licensees; however, they find that training licensees is crucial for ensuring they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and ethical standards to perform their duties competently and responsibly, ultimately benefiting both the individuals and the public they serve. The Board conducts quarterly real-time, interactive video conferences/webinars to large group face-to-face interaction and collaboration with its licensees. This platform has allowed an overwhelming amount of participation and positive response from licensees. The video conferencing benefits of training licensees enhance competence and performance. Licensees are equipped with the up-to-date knowledge and skills required to perform their roles effectively and efficiently, leading to improved performance, productivity, and compliance. Training also helps licensees understand and adhere to relevant regulations, standards, and ethical guidelines, minimizing the risk of errors, legal issues, and reputational damage. Well-trained licensees are more confident in their abilities and feel better prepared to handle their

responsibilities. In this profession that directly impacts public health, safety, or well-being, training ensures licensees possess the necessary qualifications to minimize risks and provide quality services. Effective training can even reduce errors, rework, and the need for costly interventions, leading to overall cost savings for the Board and staff.

While the Board is not required to provide continuing education to licensees, it recognizes that offering training is vital to ensuring counselors are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and ethical standards necessary to serve the public competently and responsibly. As a regulatory body charged with protecting the public, the Board views education as a proactive tool to enhance professional performance, reduce risk, and uphold the integrity of the counseling profession. Therefore, the Board has begun providing quarterly, real-time interactive video conferences and large-group, face-to-face training sessions. These sessions have consistently drawn high attendance and engagement from licensees across the state, demonstrating both the demand for and the value of such programming. The overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores the effectiveness of these trainings in promoting competence, professionalism, and regulatory compliance.

These educational initiatives equip licensees with up-to-date knowledge and practical skills, enhance ethical decision-making, and improve service delivery. They also reduce the likelihood of errors, legal violations, and complaints, ultimately minimizing reputational and financial risks for both licensees and the Board. Well-trained professionals are more confident in their roles, better prepared to manage complex clinical and administrative responsibilities, and more likely to deliver safe, effective care to the public.

In addition to promoting quality mental health services, these trainings support the Board's operational goals by reducing the need for corrective actions and costly interventions. Overall, the Board's investment in licensee education strengthens the profession, protects the public, and contributes to long-term cost savings and regulatory efficiency.

- **Updating the Board's online portal for licensees and applicants.** The redesign and improvement to the Board's portal for licensees to manage their license, applications, etc., budget request was approved in FY 2025. However, due to the lengthy competitive procurement process, work on the Board's new licensing management software did not begin until FY 2026. The primary goal of the project was to customize, test, and implement a COTS License Management and Enforcement System, which will serve the needs of the Board for the next decade. The project included the conversion of data from the Board's current legacy system and provided training to staff in the use and management of the system. After production implementation, the Board will acquire the appropriate hardware and equipment necessary to operate the system. The Board remains committed to ongoing updates and improvements to the licensee portal to maintain a streamlined, user-friendly, and modern platform for licensee access and interaction.

Ongoing improvements will focus on streamlining the user experience, reducing confusion, and the need for direct assistance from Board staff. In conjunction with these updates to the online portal, the Board will also develop and provide instructional videos, training modules, and Lunch and Learn sessions, which will be available to all licensees

and applicants to guide them in effectively using the upgraded system. Maintaining an updated online portal for licensees will provide a better, more efficient experience for licensees' needs, minimizing the need to call the Board's office. Second, as part of updating the online portal, the Board will provide instructional videos and training modules to navigate the online portal for licensees and applicants.

- **Facilitated a 2-day, long-range planning meeting.** The Board will continue to hold annual long-range planning meetings focused on evaluating licensure compliance, considering potential and needed changes to the Rules and Regulations, advancing website improvements, and developing training initiatives. These meetings will also address the implementation and impact of the National Counseling Compact, signed into law in FY2023, on the operations of the LPC Board.
- **Outside investigator for complaints.** The number and complexity of complaints, investigations, and administrative hearings before the Board continue to increase significantly each year. Board members, who serve on a volunteer basis without compensation, already dedicate substantial time to monthly Board business, approving applications and licensure requirements, reviewing Rules and Regulations, and considering licensee requests. Board members who are in private practice often do not recoup lost earnings for attending Board meetings. Investigations are conducted outside of formal meetings and require a considerable commitment of Board members' time—ranging from 3–4 hours for routine matters to 40–60 hours for complex cases. While Board members are trained as counselors and educators, they do not possess the specialized skills required for complex and comprehensive investigations. To assist with the more demanding cases, the Board has contracted with an external investigator; however, their availability is limited in comparison to the number of complaints and financial constraints. A full reliance on outside investigators remains cost-prohibitive. Therefore, the Board and the public at large would greatly benefit from additional outside investigators and, at the very least, enhanced training for its members in investigative procedures and complaint resolution. Additionally, former Board members can serve as consultants to support current investigators and ensure consistency and quality in handling complex cases.
- **Staffing Needs.** The Board will continue to assess its staffing needs as the residual effects from COVID, telehealth practices, accepting license transfers, Universal Licensure, and National Counseling Compact are examined.
- **National Counseling Compact.** On March 16, 2022, Governor Tate Reeves signed House Bill 1056, making Mississippi the fourth state to enact the Counseling Compact. The Compact became active once 10 states passed legislation approving participation. This Compact represents a significant step forward in addressing licensure portability and the mental health workforce shortage across state lines. The National Counseling Compact offers Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) in participating states a more streamlined and efficient process for practicing across state boundaries, eliminating the need for multiple licenses. Implementation of the Compact in Mississippi required revisions to the Board's Rules and Regulations to align with national standards. Mississippi is proud to have a designated delegate serving on the Compact Commission and on the Compact Commission's Rules and Regulations Committee, which is tasked with developing uniform licensure standards and facilitating mutual recognition of

licenses across member states. The Compact is expected to offer a faster and more efficient pathway to licensure portability compared to Universal Licensure. The Board may require additional software, hardware upgrades, and the development of an Application Programming Interface (API) to enable direct communication and integration with the National Counseling Compact.

- **Technology for the Board.** The Board provides newly appointed members with essential equipment and upgrades outdated technology used by current members to ensure efficient performance and user-friendly access to Board systems. These updates support the effective functioning of Board members, the Board attorney, and the Executive Director. Additionally, the Board is investing in equipment to support the delivery of online training sessions, including Lunch and Learns, to provide accessible continuing education opportunities and to provide for the dissemination of important Rules and Regulation changes for Mississippi licensees.

5. Agency's External/Internal Assessment

The Board, through its regularly scheduled and special-called board meetings, discusses agency performance, priorities for the upcoming quarter, and any additional issues that may affect the agency, the general public, which the Board is charged with protecting, and/or the practice of professional counseling in the State of Mississippi, and addresses deficiencies in the process. The Board continues an ongoing process of evaluating all aspects of duties and responsibilities under the Board's mandate. This includes contracted services, standards outlined in the Rules and Regulations, Statutes, and standards/processes for licensing and license renewal. Based on this ongoing evaluation, the Board has made the following assessments:

- 1) As the demand for professional licensure increases among individuals seeking employment in Mississippi, the LPC Board experiences higher operational costs. However, this growth in licensure also generates increased revenue through fee collection, helping to offset those expenses.
- 2) The increased tendency of the public to file formal complaints against licensees, the Board's proactive efforts to investigate persons practicing as a counselor without proper license, and the need to conduct hearings for licensure denials for persons not meeting proper licensure requirements, all contribute to higher costs associated with paying Board members expenses, hearing officers, and court reporters for participation in these hearings. These demands reduce the Board's ability to review licensure application files during monthly in-person meetings, which may result in longer processing times for licensure approvals.
- 3) Increased expediency of Board action is directly related to the increased number of Regularly Scheduled and Special Called meetings and the overwhelming amount of time required by volunteer Board members outside of these meetings to prepare for meetings and to investigate complaints.
- 4) Automated documentation by an interactive website will positively impact Board personnel and the Board's overall productivity. Maintaining the agency's website in line

with recommendations from the PEER Committee will impact expenses for the continued web design, data migration, and ongoing management of the online portal system. Advancements in technology have increased the Board's productivity outside of face-to-face meetings and created opportunities for virtual collaboration. Virtual Board meetings help reduce travel and meeting-related expenses.

The duties of the five appointed Board members, made up of representatives from each Congressional District plus one at-large member with an elected Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer, are: to develop guidelines and implement procedures for granting state licenses to professional counselors who meet the specified criteria; investigating all formal complaints about the licensed professional; ensure ethical and legal practices of licensed professional counselors in the State of Mississippi; and develop rules and regulations to support licensed professionals to protect the welfare of the public.

The Board is statutorily required to hold only two regular meetings per year; however, due to the growing number of licensure applicants resulting from the implementation of a step license, statutory mandates related to Universal Licensure and the National Counseling Compact, an increase in formal complaints, and other administrative demands, it has become necessary to meet more frequently. These meetings occur both in person—typically for 1–2 days—and via video or teleconference as supplemental needs arise. (In FY2026, the Board met at least 14 times, with five meetings spanning multiple days.) These meetings enable the Board to take action on official requests, provide guidance to the Executive Director, review licensure applications, conduct complaint hearings, establish policies and regulations, and offer educational programming to Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) and Board-Qualified Supervisors (LPC-Ss), including through presentations at state and regional conferences.

To further support licensee education and outreach, the Board has initiated virtual training opportunities such as Lunch and Learn sessions, which provide convenient online access to continuing education and professional development. To successfully host and manage these virtual trainings, the Board must invest in updated and reliable equipment. With advancements in technology and the continued use of an online licensee database, the purchase and maintenance of user-friendly technology for all five Board members, the Executive Director, and the Board Attorney is essential. This equipment is critical for efficiently conducting Board meetings, compliance reviews, licensure hearings, and virtual training sessions. Updating and replacing this equipment will enhance the overall productivity and effectiveness of the Board and its personnel.

- 5) The Board developed and implemented a jurisprudence assessment in FY 2020 and extensively revised it in FY2023 to ensure licensees are staying abreast of the Rules and Regulations of the Board, *Miss Code Ann.* § 73-30-1, et al., and the Board adopted the *American Counseling Association Code of Ethics*. The FY2023 revisions to the jurisprudence assessment were necessary due to the sweeping changes in the Board's Rules and Regulations implemented in FY2023, which provided fewer restrictive regulations for Professional Counselor licensure pathway for first-time Applicants as well as to allow an easier licensing process for licensees from other states moving to Mississippi. The Board also developed and implemented a new pass/fail jurisprudence examination in FY 2023 to ensure license applicants are aware of the current Rules and Regulations of the Board, *Miss*

Code Ann. § 73-30-1, et al., and the Board adopted the *American Counseling Association Code of Ethics*. The Board will continue to monitor the competency, effectiveness, and excellence of the Licensed Professional Counselors through the requirement of continuing education for renewal of licenses as well as the administration of jurisprudence examination. As Rules and Regulations and Statutes are revised or updated and legislation introduced, the Board is required to continue to update the jurisprudence assessment as well as the Mississippi Pass/Fail Jurisprudence Examination.

- 6) The Board invested in LiveScan fingerprinting processing software and hardware, including FingerPro ID software and Green Bit DactyScan 84c ten-print Livescan equipment and a card scanner, to reduce the turnaround time for receiving fingerprint results from the FBI, DPS, and CIC. During the COVID-19 pandemic, response times for background checks significantly increased due to the shutdown of various state agencies and have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels following the Governor’s Proclamation in March 2020. These delays in receiving background check results caused substantial hold-ups in processing licensure applications, as many remained incomplete without fingerprint clearance, ultimately impacting the number of mental health professionals licensed in Mississippi and limiting public access to qualified counseling and psychotherapy services. The Board’s acquisition of the LiveScan equipment has allowed for more immediate fingerprint processing, expediting background checks and helping to streamline the licensure process.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program

6.1 Agency Goals by Program

Program 1: Licensure & Regulation

GOAL A: Issue licenses to individuals who satisfactorily meet set standards and qualifications (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-1 & 73-30-7 & 73-30-9 & 73-30-21*)

Objective A.1. Develop and impose standards that must be met by individuals to receive a license as a professional counselor or a step license as a supervisee

Outcome: Change in the number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)
Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed (%)
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a comprehensive application that requires a fingerprint background check and satisfactorily meets minimum requirements to become licensed as a professional counselor

Output: Number of complaints filed yearly
Output: Number of new Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors licenses issued
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

Objective A.2. Develop and implement educational programs to train Licensed Professional Counselors who are Board-qualified supervisors

Output: Number of LPC-Supervisors
Outcome: Change in the number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

A.2.1. STRATEGY: Provide ongoing training to Board-qualified supervisors

Output: Number of LPC-Supervisors
Output: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

GOAL B: Renew licenses for individuals who satisfactorily meet requirements (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-29*)

Objective B.1. Review and assess qualifications for renewal of licenses for both the Professional Counselors and Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed against Professional Counselors (%)
Outcome: Change in number of persons not meeting license renewal requirements (%)

B.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a comprehensive renewal application that requires personal and licensure history, a fingerprint background check every 6 years, and satisfactorily meets continuing education requirements for a Licensed Professional Counselor

Output: Number of license renewals received
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

GOAL C: Regulate and enforce the laws governing Licensed Professional Counselors and Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-1 & 73-30-13*)

Objective C.1. Establish procedures to ensure compliance with standards, laws, and rules

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed (%)
Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)

Objective C.2. Regulate and enforce state laws and rules

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)
Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)

Objective C.3. Conduct complaint investigations and hearings as needed

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)

Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)

C.4.1. STRATEGY: Follow established statutes, rules, and policy for investigating any complaint against a Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor, an applicant who has been denied licensure, or someone practicing without a license

Output: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)