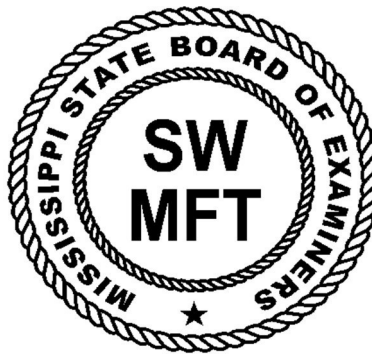


MISSISSIPPI

BOARD OF EXAMINERS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS AND MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS



FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR FISCAL YEARS 2028 – 2032

1. Mission Statement

The mission of the Mississippi Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists (Board) 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 profession of social work and marriage and family therapy widely affects public health, safety and welfare, which requires appropriate regulation and control in the public interest. The Board is the appointed body responsible for monitoring these actions through licensing and regulation. The philosophy of the Board 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. By creating a human-centered approach, we keep the needs of the public interest in mind.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

The Board 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. The Board has partnered with the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services (ITS) in order of achieving new sought after goals for our agency to bridge our daily operations with a reliable, more secure source in technology.

Statewide Goal

To execute all licensing and regulation related to social work and marriage and family therapy in the State of Mississippi, to protect the public's safety, including providing timely and appropriate responses to filed complaints, and the completion of resolving those cases, and to develop an efficient and convenient system for processing applications, renewals, and other forms and documents through the use of new innovative technology.

Benchmarks

Licensure and Compliance

- 1) Ensure licensure compliance
- 2) Implement clear standards
- 3) Current Rules and Regulations revisions based on Legislative actions and a response to economic changes and technological advancements
- 4) Agency funding saved by providing government services online (e.g. document retrieval, online applications, license renewal)

- 5) Number and average cost of regulatory actions taken, by regulatory body and type of action

Regulatory Efficiency

- 1) Case clearance rates (the number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases)
- 2) Age of pending case load (number of days from case filing to date of measurement of the pending caseload)
- 3) Average cost of processing a single case, by case type
- 4) Average length of time to resolution of documented complaints to professional licensing agencies

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Plan

Agency Goals

As part of the strategic planning process, the Board has established clear goals to improve services and performance strategies for the five-year period.

The primary goals include:

- Protecting the public through the enforcement of regulating licensure and compliance
- Investigate complaints and promote regulatory compliance
- Provide an assessable, secure portal for licensees and applicants
- New policy creation and updating existing policies

Objectives

To help identify, prioritize, and accomplish the goals stated above, the Board seeks to achieve various technological advancements to provide a secure and reliable platform for licensees and applicants, as well as advancing technology to support new innovation and improvement of services and daily office functions. These advancements will be achieved by cross-agency collaboration with ITS and other state Agencies. Other objectives of the Board include implementing new policies and updating existing policies to support current and future needs of the agency.

Priorities

Improved Licensure System: In FY2023, the current database system and renewal portal became inoperable. The crippled system left licensee's without a reliable means of completing their renewal process online. At the same time, our agency worked in collaboration with ITS to develop a new, reliable, secure portal for licensees to update their renewal information and other information such as their mailing address, email address, and phone number.

Through joint efforts with ITS, the Board implemented a new, secure portal, Licensing and Reporting System (LARS), which allowed applicants and licensees to transmit renewal entries securely via an online platform. Improving Board staff efficiencies with access to relevant and up-to-date technology has proven to 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 2028 and FY 2029 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 the first phase of LARS, the agency worked in collaboration with ITS to create the portal for licensure renewal of current licensees. For FY 2028, the agency will determine the best ways to conceptualize how staff, Board members, licensees, and applicants interact with the current system and determine the best method for implementing a new system to best accommodate both disciplines. The agency-wide evaluation of the system will allow us to determine its effectiveness through current data obtain from various system reports and seek opportunities to improve any fragmentations within the system.

Complaint Processing: Improvements to the complaints process seeks to maximize consumer protection. In the past, the current average turnaround time for complaint investigations was 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 2028 is to continue 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 and the Executive Director. The Board will contract with an investigator during FY 2028 at a cost not to exceed \$20,000. It is estimated that the addition of an investigator would close the three-year processing gap to one-year maximum case completion.

Network Infrastructure and Computing Solutions: With the development of new technology, there is an increase for risks, which involve targeted attacks to the network system. The Board in conjunction with ITS will continue to work collaboratively to create and improve new technology solutions to safeguard systems by maintaining up-to-date software including antivirus, firewall protection and intrusion, cloud storage, mobile device management, software updates such as Microsoft Office 365, developing and updating policies such as background checks, security, and telecommunications.

Cloud Services have rapidly evolved with the hopes of enhancing efficiencies, productivity, and cost savings to agencies. According to ITS, the concept of cloud service delivery is the utilization of data storage, databases, networks, and services through the internet. Cloud services allows the entity to save and retrieve documents and files from a remote location. It has redefined and altered the landscape of information technology. Modernization of the current network infrastructure is crucial for our agency to increase and expand security measures such as cyber protection, antivirus and software updates.

Agency Compliance: In response to evolving internal and external factors, the need for agency evaluation becomes necessary to remain in compliance with rules, regulations, laws, and

statutes pertaining to social work and marriage and family therapy licensure. The Board seeks to shift to a more proactive and systematic approach to determine potential and current agency needs and problems. For FY 2028, the Board will determine the best approach for the development and updating of policies such as background checks, security, and telecommunications.

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 to protect the citizens of Mississippi.

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 has minimized payment issues, lost or delayed mail, and provide accurate application of licensure with minimal mistakes. The new renewal portal has allowed licensees to receive their updated license in real time, as soon as the renewal has been processed. The Board seeks to add an applicant portal that will allow applicants the same convenience, thus minimizing payment issues, lost or delayed mail, and provide accurate application submissions with minimal mistakes.

External/Internal Factors – Board Workforce

The impact of COVID-19 and our agency's response to licensure and the negatively impacted workload of staff gives us the opportunity to increase services to improve efficiency. With only a staff of three, an assessment is needed to reassign office duties among current staff and to consider the addition of contracted services such as investigations for complaints, IT managed services, and a CE coordinator for continuing education.

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. Senate Bill 2727 was introduced and passed during the FY 2025 Legislative Session implementing an Act to enact into Law the Social Work Licensure Compact and provide that the State of Mississippi enter the compact with other states that join the compact. The purpose of this compact is to facilitate interstate practice of regulated social workers by improving public access to competent social work services. The compact preserves the regulatory authority of states to protect public health and safety through the current system of state licensure. The Board will need to make significant technological changes and upgrades to accommodate and comply with the compact requirements.

5.1 Internal Management Systems Used to Evaluate Agency's Performance

The Board is comprised of (ten) 10 Board members. Six (6) Board members are licensed social workers and four (4) Board members are licensed marriage and family therapist. Six (6) Board members are appointed by the Governor and four (4) Board members are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. The Executive Director reports directly to the Board and provides updates regarding agency performance. The Board is responsible for licensing, qualified applicants for social work in marriage and family therapy, and for enforcing rules and regulations to safeguard the public and regulating licensure compliance.

The analysis of internal performance is monitored yearly through the Performance Review Appraisal (PRA) system by the MS State Personnel Board. The system is useful in determining administrative strengths and burdens of staff. It also targets areas where improvement is needed within the agency but also identifies what no longer works for the agency's daily business functions.

6. Agency Goals, Objective, Strategies and Measures by Program for FY 2028 through FY 2032:

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: Percentage of social work applications received monthly for processing

Outcome: Percentage of marriage and family therapy applications received monthly for processing

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a simplified and effective application process for social work and marriage and family therapy applicants

Output: Number of new LSW social work applications

Output: Number of new LMSW social work applications

Output: Number of new LCSW social work applications

Output: Number of new LMFT marriage and family therapy applications

Output: Number of new LMFTA marriage and family therapy associate applications

Efficiency: Average time to process applications

Explanatory: This is an administrative function essential for evaluating new applications ensure qualifications are met to sit for exams toward licensure in social work and marriage and family therapy

A.1.2. STRATEGY: Maintain a thorough process of verifying that each applicant meets the requirements for social work and marriage and family therapy licensure

Output: Number of licensed LSW level social workers

Output: Number of licensed LMSW level social workers

Output: Number of licensed LCSW level social workers

Output: Number of licensed LMFT level marriage and family therapists

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

Efficiency: Average time to issue a license to applicants

Explanatory: This is an administrative function necessary to carry out daily office operations that support the overall mission of the agency to ensure new applicants meet the qualifications set forth in the rules and regulations that govern social work and marriage and family therapy

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: 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: 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 in a timeframe no greater than one year

GOAL C: Provide currently licensed social workers and marriage and family therapists with a secure, reliable online portal to renew their licenses

OBJECTIVE C.1. Provide an accessible, reliable, secure, and expedient renewal system for currently licensed social workers and marriage and family therapists.

Outcome: Percentage of social workers who renew their license
Outcome: Percentage of marriage and family therapists who renew their license

C.1.1. STRATEGY: Migrate from paper applications into an online application platform

Output: Total number of licensees who renewed
Output: Total number of licensees who did not renew

Efficiency: Average cost of maintaining the online system

Explanatory: The previous renewal portal was unreliable with time constraints of document entry for licensees. The new renewal portal allows staff and licensees to review entries in real-time and to make revisions. The new system also decreases processing time for both licensee and staff.