

TEXAS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Darrel D. Spinks



MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Gloria Z. Canseco, M.A., Chair

Dr.h.c. Sarah Abraham
John K. Bielamowicz
Timothy M. Brown, M.S.W.
Steve Christopherson, M.S.
Susan Fletcher, Ph.D.
George Francis, IV, M.B.A.
Ben Morris, M.Ed.
Jennifer Smothermon, M.A.

Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council Meeting Agenda July 28, 2020, 11:30am

Due to Governor Greg Abbott's March 13, 2020 proclamation of a state of disaster affecting all counties in Texas due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the Governor's March 16, 2020 suspension of certain provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act, the July 28, 2020 meeting of the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council will be held by videoconference call, as authorized under Texas Government Code section 551.127. There will be no physical meeting location open to the public so long as the disaster declaration is in effect.

Members of the public will have access and a means to participate in this meeting, by two-way communication, by entering the URL address <https://zoom.us/j/91764938985> into their web browser or by calling (346) 248-7799 and entering the webinar/meeting ID 917 6493 8985. Additional telephone numbers and videoconference call access information can be found in the attached addendum. An electronic copy of the agenda and meeting materials will be made available at www.bhec.texas.gov prior to the meeting. A recording of the meeting will be available after the meeting is adjourned. To obtain a recording, please contact Brenda Skiff, at Open.Records@tsbep.texas.gov.

For public participants, once the public comment item is reached on the agenda after the meeting convenes, the presiding officer will ask those joining by computer to use the "raise hand" feature to indicate who would like to make a public comment. Those individuals who raise their hand will then be unmuted to give public comment. Once all of the individuals with raised hands have been given an opportunity to make public comment, the individuals appearing by telephone will be unmuted and asked whether they would like to make a public comment. When making a public comment, please identify yourself and whether you are speaking individually or on behalf of an organization. All public comments will be limited to 3 minutes, unless otherwise directed by the presiding officer. In lieu of providing public comment during the meeting, you may submit written public comments via email to Executive.Director@tsbep.texas.gov in advance of the meeting. The written public comments received will be submitted to the council members for their consideration during the meeting, but will not be read aloud.

In the event Governor Greg Abbott's March 13, 2020 disaster declaration is not renewed or expires prior to July 28th, then pursuant to Tex. Gov't Code Ann. §551.127, notice is hereby given that one or more Council members may appear at the scheduled meeting via videoconference call, but the presiding officer will be physically present at 333 Guadalupe St., Ste. 2-450E, Austin, Texas 78701. This location will be open to the public only in the event the March 13th disaster declaration is not renewed.

Please note that the Council may request input during the meeting from any interested parties or members of the public during its discussion of an agenda item.

If you are planning to attend this meeting and need auxiliary aids, services or materials in an alternate format, please contact the Council at least 5 working days before the meeting date. Phone: (512) 305-7700,

FAX: (512) 305-7701, E-MAIL: Executive.Director@tsbep.texas.gov, TTY/RELAY TEXAS: 711 or 1-800-RELAY TX.

The Council may go into Executive Session to deliberate any item listed on this agenda if authorized under Texas Open Meetings Act, Government Code, Ch. 551.

The Council may discuss and take action concerning any matter on the agenda and in a different order from what it appears herein.

NOTES:

- There may be a quorum of the members from each of the following boards present at the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council meeting: the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists; the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners; the Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists; and the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors.

Council Meeting Agenda for July 28, 2020 at 11:30am

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call and Certification of Quorum
3. Public Comments – Public Comment is limited to three (3) minutes per person, unless otherwise directed by the presiding officer.
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 applications; and
 - c. Planning for a possible second round of stay-at-home orders resulting from a resurgence of COVID-19.
5. Presentation from ASWB on processing applications for examination approval through the ASWB licensing portal.
6. Discussion regarding exceptional items to be included in 2022-23 Legislative Appropriations Request
7. Adjournment

Addendum: Additional Videoconference and Telephone Conference Call Information

When: Jul 28, 2020 11:30 AM Central Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council July 28, 2020 Meeting

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://zoom.us/j/91764938985>

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +13462487799,,91764938985# or +16699009128,,91764938985#

Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

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Action Plan on Licensing Backlog Affecting the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners

Background and Scope of Plan. In response to the backlog of applications pending before the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners, the Council directed the Executive Director at its June 16, 2020 regular meeting to coordinate with HHSC PLCU staff to develop a plan to address these backlogs. The Council directed that the plan specifically address three areas of concern as they relate to the backlog. These areas consist of:

1. Develop and plan revisions to the licensing process that will prevent or reduce the likelihood of future backlogs;
2. Develop and implement a plan to eliminate the existing backlog in the licensing process; and
3. Develop a plan for ensuring continued timely licensing operations under current executive orders, as well as any reasonably foreseeable future amendments or expansion of those orders.

Significant Factors Contributing to Backlog. Following discussions between the Executive Director and HHSC PLCU staff, agency staff have identified the following factors that have played a significant role in causing the backlog. These factors are:

1. The PLCU has suffered significant staff attrition and is currently staffed at only 50% capacity;
2. The impact of COVID-19 on virtually all aspects of Board and HHSC operations. By way of example, PLCU staff were not issued laptops until mid to late June, and even then, there were significant limitations on the ability to access the regulatory database due to intra-agency limitations on HHSC issued computers accessing a DSHS database system;
3. Significant health issues within the PLCU staff ranks (separate and apart from COVID-19) that resulted in staff being absent from work for longer periods of time than normal, thereby reducing productivity;
4. The involvement of different PLCU staff in the handling and processing of an application which leads to delays and sometimes lost paperwork as the application and supporting materials are transferred between staff members;
5. A problem within the version of the regulatory database utilized by the PLCU that has reduced the licensing efficiency for social work applicants in particular. More specifically, the database does not reflect when clinical supervision plans have been approved, which leads to confusion and subsequent delays when applicants and supervisors provide incorrect dates on application and supervision forms;

6. Until recently, PLCU staff have had limited access to the PLCU office under executive orders and HHSC policy. This fact coupled with their heavy reliance upon in-office paper-based processing and review of application materials has proven problematic;
7. Seasonal spike in applicants who graduated in May;
8. Exam testing centers have begun testing again; and
9. Administratively burdensome eligibility or procedural requirements set forth in current board rules or application materials, e.g., the requirement to seek approval of supervision plans, requirement for 3 personal references.

Action Item No. 1: Revisions to licensing process that will prevent or reduce likelihood of future backlogs.

1. The Council will employ greater utilization of online services to reduce the time-consuming need for physical processing of paperwork. By way of example, the Council has mandated online renewals, expanded online self-help features for licensees (e.g., change of address, ordering duplicate renewal permits, converting to inactive status), and has begun discussions with ASWB about handling some aspects of the application process through ASWB's licensing portal. Additionally, the Council will encourage online applicants to upload their application materials through the online licensing system, rather than submitting those materials by email or regular mail.
2. Applications and supporting materials will be scanned into the system for use by staff, rather than continuing to rely upon physical paperwork. This should greatly expand staff's ability to process application materials remotely and reduce the likelihood for lost or misplaced paperwork.
3. Once the *esprit de corps* necessary for team building has been established within this new agency, the Executive Director intends to take full advantage of the ability for staff to telecommute, which should result in reduced turn-over and help ensure continued productivity, even in times where working from the office is not possible or advisable. Council staff will be issued laptops capable of remotely logging into the Council's regulatory database and file servers.
4. Applications received by the Council will be sorted by application type and directed to individual staff members tasked with reviewing and processing only those types of applications. This will eliminate the need to transfer applications between various staff members and reduce the likelihood for delay and lost paperwork. This system should also result in greater continuity and customer service to applicants who will have a consistent and singular point of contact for their application should they have questions.
5. The Council will employ cross-training of all staff to ensure the greatest extent of coverage for staff positions in the event of an absence or vacancy.
6. The Executive Director and PLCU staff intend to bring several suggested rule changes before the Board to reduce the administrative burden on both the applicant and agency staff in terms of submitting and processing applications.

Action Item No. 2: Develop and implement a plan to eliminate the existing backlog in the licensing process.

The following steps have been taken by HHSC to address the backlog:

1. HHSC has authorized weekend overtime for PLCU staff through August 31st;
2. HHSC has authorized the use of temporary employees to supplement and assist PLCU staff;
3. Issued laptops to PLCU staff; and

4. The PLCU is permitting staff to voluntarily return to work more frequently than the current rotating basis. *While the shortage of staff has made social distancing within the office easier, staff remain reluctant to return to the office.*

It is important to remember that regulatory authority over the practice of social work does not transfer to the Council until September 1st. As a result, the Council's plan to eliminate the backlog is necessarily prospective in nature, beginning on September 1st.

The following steps have been initiated or will be taken by the Council to address the backlog:

1. Applications pending before the Council on September 1st will be sorted by application type and directed to individual staff members tasked with reviewing and processing only those types of applications. This will eliminate the need to transfer applications between various staff members and reduce the likelihood for delay and lost paperwork. This system should also result in greater continuity and customer service to applicants who will have a consistent and singular point of contact for their application should they have questions.
2. The Executive Director has begun discussions with ASWB about handling some aspects of the application process through ASWB's licensing portal. Such an outsourcing has the potential to allow the Council to operate more efficiently and cost-effective, but must be researched within the context of the GAA and other applicable state law.
3. If none of the foregoing options operate to reduce the backlog, the Council may temporarily reassign staff to address the backlog and bring the social work application numbers in line with the other boards.

Action Item No. 3: Develop a plan for ensuring continued timely licensing operations under current executive orders, as well as any reasonably foreseeable future amendments or expansion of those orders.

1. Once the *esprit de corps* necessary for team building has been established within this new agency, the Executive Director intends to take full advantage of the ability for staff to telecommute, which should result in reduced turn-over and help ensure continued productivity, even in times where working from the office is not possible or advisable. Council staff will be issued laptops capable of remotely logging into the Council's regulatory database and file servers.
2. The Council will employ greater utilization of online services to reduce the time-consuming need for physical processing of paperwork. By way of example, the Council will encourage online applicants to upload their application materials through the online licensing system, rather than submitting those materials by email or regular mail. Additionally, once the agency is fully functioning after September 1st, the Council should begin exploring the use of advanced online licensing systems (e.g., the PLUS system) to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of licensing operations.
3. Applications received by the Council will be sorted by application type and directed to individual staff members tasked with reviewing and processing only those types of applications. This will eliminate the need to transfer applications between various staff members and reduce the likelihood for delay and lost paperwork. This system should also result in greater continuity and customer service to applicants who will have a consistent and singular point of contact for their application should they have questions.