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Mr. Larry Gonzales, Chair of the Sunset Commission

Mr. Van Taylor, Vice Chair of the Sunset Commission and All Sunset Committee Members

P.O. Box 12068

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Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Representative Gonzales and Senator Taylor and All Sunset Committee Members:

I am writing in regard to the Sunset Committee's staff recommendations regarding the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists. My thoughts are very similar to those of almost all psychologists across the state.

1) We would like to retain our independent board, the Texas State Board of Psychological Examiners rather than being merged in with other professions under the Texas Department of Licensure and Regulation, as proposed. Our current regulatory Board is operating efficiently and cost effectively and is processing applications and resolving complaints in far less time than it takes other Boards to perform these functions for social workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists.

We are a doctoral level profession and our training is substantially different than that of the other mental health professions, especially given our training in clinical evaluation and testing, and the extensiveness of our training. The field of psychology is vast and complex, with many subspecialties. Increasingly, there are more subspecialties. We believe that it takes an independent Board to have staff and Board members with the knowledge and deep familiarity with the field to draft and modify rules, regulations, and policies that will maintain the highest standards of the profession and which will not have unintended or adverse consequences for the public or for psychologists. Our current Board also engages in educational and training efforts to prevent and reduce violations of rules by psychologists and to protect the public.

2) The Sunset Commission has also recommended elimination of the currently required Post Doctoral supervised year of practice necessary prior to licensure. Most psychologists see the Post Doctoral year as a quality control measure which protects our profession and the public. While psychologists do a year of supervised practice prior to obtaining their Ph.D., this isn't really adequate to

allow for independent practice, given the subspecialties of our field and given the challenging situations that psychology post doctoral fellows often encounter in practice. The Post Doctoral year is a time to learn to handle complicated, urgent situations and to apply "book learning" in real life under some supervision. Post Doctoral psychology trainees are usually able to find jobs in clinics, universities, and other settings, and their services, while under supervision, are covered by most insurance and now Medicaid, so that the Post Doctoral year is not a barrier to access to care.

My Post Doctoral supervised year was a real asset to me in my professional development. I wanted training to competently work with children and families and there was very little training of this type offered by my doctoral program in psychology even though it was APA approved, as was my internship. I sought out a Post Doc supervised year at Dallas Child Guidance Clinic to get the training I needed and I had a reasonable salary. Once licensed, I continued to work at Dallas Child Guidance Clinic for another year as a Staff Psychologist before returning to Austin when I began practicing independently. The background in child and family work that I got on my Post Doc year was an important foundation for my now 26 years in private practice.

To suggest that we don't need a post doctoral supervised year to ensure competence and protect the public is similar to a suggestion that the Texas Medical Board drop off a year of specialized residency training without consultation with medical experts. We believe that psychologists are best able to establish minimal requirements for training.

3) The Sunset Commission has recommended that we eliminate the oral exam for candidates for licensure. We want to retain our oral exam. In predoctoral training programs much learning is "by the book" and there aren't many opportunities for direct face to face observation of how a psychologist communicates with others and responds to a hypothetical case involving complicated issues. Much of a psychologists' work involves interacting with patients and colleagues, often in stressful situations. It is important for aspiring psychologists to be able to grasp emergency situations quickly and "on their feet" when needed, and to be able to make recommendations that ensure appropriate treatment and patient safety. Currently, psychologists volunteer their services to perform oral exams of candidates for licensure and the cost of the exam is small. While a small percent of psychologists fail the oral exam, it is important that they get the training they need to be able to respond in real time and make the right recommendations for treatment. They can then take the exam again.

4) The Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists is charged with developing a new definition of psychology following a decision by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals that our current definition is overly broad. It is essential that the new definition include psychologists' ability to diagnose mental health problems. Our training in clinical diagnosis and testing is at the heart of our profession and for many years we have been submitting diagnostic codes to insurance companies. Our reimbursement from all insurance and from Medicare and Medicaid depends on being able to assign a diagnostic code to patients. If we were not able to assign diagnoses to patients, our patients would have to seek out physicians prior to accessing psychological treatment, many of whom may not prefer to treat people with mental health problems. This could create a serious obstruction for those seeking mental health care and an overwhelming burden for physicians. Many of my referrals come directly from

physicians and they have no hesitation about my assigning diagnostic codes to patients and discussing my recommendations for patient care.

Thank you for considering these concerns and for you time.

Respectfully,

Bonny Gardner Ph.D.

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