

December 4, 2016

Re: Texas Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report – Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists

Dear Honorable Sunset Advisory Commission Member:

I am a Licensed Psychologist in the state of Texas and the incoming President of the Capital Area Psychological Association. I write to you today to express my deep concern about four issues:

- 1) Maintaining the independence of our Texas State Board of Psychologists
- 2) Continuing to offer the oral exam as one of our measures of competence
- 3) Maintaining the requirement of the Postdoctoral Year of specialization
- 4) Refining the definition of the practice of Psychology as has been requested by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals

First, it is essential that we have an independent licensing board that has strict licensing requirements for psychologists. Psychology is a highly specialized field with many sub-disciplines and the licensing exams are very difficult. The primary reason for this is to protect the public by having high standards for our profession. Our work helps determine the medications people take, saves lives, helps people cope with severe mental illness, get through the most difficult times in their lives and get back to normal functioning. The requirement that we get a Ph.D. demands that we are also researchers and scholars who understand our area of knowledge at a deeper level. I attended one of the best programs in the country at the University of Texas and spent my life achieving the good grades and test scores required to get into my very competitive program. At the time I was one of 13/250 to be admitted. I have been trained by excellent clinicians all over the world to obtain high levels of knowledge in the areas in which I chose to specialize. Placing us under another board is not feasible due to the different requirements for our different fields.

Second, the oral exam is an essential measure of competence, as psychologists are required to think on their feet, especially in crisis situations, which are often inherent to our profession. There has been some complaint that the pass rate is too high. I see this as easily remedied by making the requirements stricter if deemed necessary. This is also not an expensive measure to administer and is important to the licensing requirement.

Third, the postdoctoral year is an essential part of our professional education to become doctors. We need to be trained in the field, as other doctors are, so that we can function competently when we enter the profession. In medicine this is called residency and in our field it is referred to as our postdoctoral year. We must apply to very competitive programs so that we can specialize in the areas in which we are interested. In my case, I worked at the Austin State Hospital on the Child and Adolescent Track and therefore have achieved high level skills (under the supervision of other psychologists) in working with severely disturbed children, adolescents, parents, and families. This has allowed me

to prevent more suffering than you can imagine and save many lives while helping families work together to get their children on track. Through my specialized training in my doctoral program, as well as the research and supervision that was required of me, I am able to help people that once used to be considered untreatable. Psychology is a Scientist-Practitioner based program that prepares Ph.D. psychologists to work with both specific and general problems of human behavior in the context of a range of social processes and systems. We are scientists who have achieved a Ph.D. and during our postdoctoral year we learn to apply our knowledge to our field with intense supervision after having already received our doctorate. This training makes it possible for us to handle very complex problems.

Fourth, we would like to clarify and define our profession as has been requested by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. We are working closely with our board to make sure that our definition the ability to diagnose mental health problems. Diagnosis and testing is an essential part of our training as psychologists and we have many courses in testing/assessment as well as clinical diagnosis. I work closely with physicians, especially psychiatrists, who appreciate and respect the skills that psychologists have in this area. They rely daily on our Psychological Evaluations to support their treatment decisions. This is one of the areas that set us apart, due to our intense level of knowledge and training in testing and evaluation, and other professionals and clients come to psychologists specifically for our expertise in this area.

In sum, I feel it is essential that we maintain our independent board in addition to the requirements in the areas stated above because all four points help strictly define us and hold us professionally accountable to the public. Many of us deal with life or death issues daily. We have a responsibility to be on top of the research in our specialized areas so that we, at all times, provide the best levels of care possible. I appreciate your time in evaluating these issues carefully and feel that it is important mostly to the clients that we serve.

Thank you for your consideration of these very important matters.

Best,

Anna Elisabeth Middleton, Ph.D.