



Committee: Health and Government Operations

Bill Number: House Bill 224

Title: Department of Information Technology – Study of a Common Information Technology Platform for Health Occupations Boards

Hearing Date: January 14, 2021

Position: Support

The Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland (LCPCM) supports *Senate Bill 224 – Department of Information Technology – Study of a Common Information Technology Platform for Health Occupations Boards*. This bill would require the Department of Information Technology to consult with the health occupation boards in making recommendations on the feasibility and cost of developing a common information technology platform for use by each board.

For the past several years, LCPCM has been following the Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists discussions in updating their information technology systems. We have been disappointed that no progress has been made. We believe this is due to confusion of next steps needed in upgrading their systems, including whether the Board needs to work with the Department of Information Technology, Maryland Department of Health, or if they can go through the State’s procurement process to solicit private bids.

Currently, the Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists must process applications for licensure through the mail. This process requires applicants to call the Board each and every time they have a question about their application as they are not able to track progress online. We believe this utilizes a lot of the Board’s staff time as well, in order to talk with applicants over the phone about their application. In addition, we know that the Board’s ability to pull important licensing data is obstructed by their current IT system. As an example, in 2018, LCPCM inquired with the Board on the number of licensees who are dually licensed as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) and a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC). Even though both of these licenses are issued by the same board, their system was unable to query the information from the database.

Finally, LCPCM believes having a process to review the current barriers for health occupation boards and making recommendations for developing a common platform is needed more now than ever. It is our understanding that while most state employees have been able to telework during the COVID Health Emergency, staff from the Board and Professional Counselors and Therapists are continuing to go into the office, albeit on a reduced schedule. This is necessary to retrieve mail, which includes licensing applications. In addition to our concern for staff safety, we believe this has slowed the processing of applications. In reviewing the 2020 Annual report for the Board, we saw a 15% decrease in the number of applications that were approved from the previous year. We believe this is partially due to delays in processing applications.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and we urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any further information, please contact Rachael faulkner at rfaulkner@policypartners.net or 410-693-4000.