

Testimony before the Senate

Re: Senate Bill 242

OPPOSITION

January 28, 2024

By Christie Polley, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

Good afternoon members of the Committee. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in opposition to the Senate Bill 242. As stated in my testimony last February, it is with great urgency that the Maryland Board of Social Work is immediately evaluated. It has been proven that they devastatingly neglect to protect mental health providers, clients who come forth with serious allegations of social workers and lack the integrity to follow through with decisions that protect the community, specifically our children. Instead, it has been found that they prioritize decisions that protect the reputation of their organization.

As explained below, I have put together an advocacy team of clinicians and attorneys to begin the process of protecting the community. I have encouraged the Maryland Board of Social Work to join us in understanding what had happened throughout my personal experience that led to re-traumatization, re-victimization, and a serious lack of integrity. Although not surprised, they never responded to my invitation.

Provided below are parts of my last testimony that provides the history of my personal experience with the Maryland Board of Social Work;

“In my personal experience, turning to this board for help at a time where you feel fearful and scared is dangerous. This needs to be changed. An advocacy group of clinicians, attorneys and other professionals who have a direct impact within our community was formed due to an unfortunate experience with the Maryland Board of Social Work and Examiners and the disciplinary process.

My engagement with the board existed between October of 2020 to November of 2022 due to a very complicated and traumatizing situation that included my previous boss having 11 complaints against him. At the start of this experience, I was very optimistic that cooperating with the board and being an advocate for those harmed would bring justice. I believed the board operated with integrity, compassion, and from a trauma-informed viewpoint. I could not have been more wrong. Instead, I found this process to continue the abuse cycle with re-victimizing and re-traumatizing the complainants and survivors of abuse. Perpetually leaving survivors of these heinous complaints to continuously check the status of the licensee for years with no communication is inexcusable. The level of anxiety and fear when coming forward and filing a complaint is profound, let alone not being at

least informed about what is happening. The lack of transparency and no communication regarding heinous crimes being disclosed is unacceptable.

I want to be clear about these complaints. They are mostly criminal in nature, with many of the complainants and witnesses unknowingly corroborating each others allegations. From my own awareness, these complaints included but are not limited to sexual abuse of a minor, sexual abuse of young women, inappropriate boundary crossing, sexual harassment, retaliation against a contracted clinician, and abandonment of clients. One complaint included asking an intern to buy a pregnancy test for a 14-year-old girl. This complaint came after it was indicated that he sexually abused another 14 year-old girl, allegedly raped a young woman and had a "sexual relationship" with her, inappropriately touched and made sexually inappropriate comments to another woman who he was treating at a sober living home comprised of women, a video surfaced of him sexually harassing another therapist insinuating she take her dress off, voice recording(s) of him sexually abusing a client and having a sexual relationship with her, endless sexual inappropriate comments by many witnesses and clients, and a long history of being fired for sexual comments to coworkers. The list goes on.

After the awareness of these horrific allegations, his license was only briefly suspended for a couple months following the indication of sexually abusing a minor. During the investigation of the 11 complaints, he was able to have full access of clients with absolutely no restrictions to minors. There was nothing to indicate that he was being investigated for 11 complaints, many criminal in nature that included sexual abuse of minor(s) and other young women.

Would you be okay with walking your child into his office to be seen and not knowing the seriousness of allegations against him? Would you be okay with a loved one seeking therapy and their therapist masturbate to them while they stand there in lingerie? Would you be okay with a therapist asking your daughter, who is in a sober living home, to write down her fantasies so he can masturbate to them when he went home, and inappropriately touching her in session? Would you be okay with not knowing a clinician gave your 14-year-old a pregnancy test?

The evidence is of an abundance, and he was able to surrender his license with no discipline.

The conclusion of the board came October of 2022 when they accepted his surrender of license after he initially gave his letter of surrender April of 2022, seven (7) months later. He was able to escape being interviewed for the 11 complaints brought against him, and is now allowed to be within our community with no repercussions, a monster in plain sight.

The decisions of the board are the reasons why abusers can continue to abuse. I see the acceptance of surrender as a means to protect the board from something I am unable to see, and in the process, protecting him from the public knowing the person that he is. Furthermore, it has even been admitted to me that these

complaints were so “egregious” that he would have eventually had his license revoked. If they were aware of how shockingly heinous these crimes are with supporting evidence, witnesses and corroboration, why not support the survivors and protect the community? He was protected, not the survivors.

I have asked the board to join in our efforts to listen to our concerns and make changes where necessary. I received no response. So now I am asking you. Please do not pass this bill without revision of the process to protect our children and our community.

... I am a clinician, mother, aunt, sister, cousin, daughter and a member of society who believes that protecting our children and those that are most vulnerable within our community is of utmost importance. Please trust me when I say, passing this bill will only perpetuate abuse and not address the seriousness of this disciplinary process, putting more people in harm's way. Do you want to be a part of the problem or solution?”

If this bill is to be passed, again, those in a position of trust and a position of power are choosing not to protect our community, not to protect our children, and not to protect those in one of the most vulnerable positions one can find themselves. This would continue to be another example in our society of the abuse cycle; protecting those that protect abusers, protecting those that choose to lack integrity to protect the reputation of an organization, and continuing to allow abusers to abuse.

I urge you to listen to me and those that oppose this bill. We are pushing for safety. We are pushing for integrity. We are pushing for accountability. We are seeking change to STOP this very obvious flawed system that continues to allow abuse to continue.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christie Polley, LCPC". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Christie" is written in a large, looped script, followed by "Polley" and "LCPC" in a slightly smaller, more compact script.

Christie Polley, LCPC