



TEXAS COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

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Senate Health & Human Services Committee

August 4, 2017

SB 114 (Hinojosa)

My name is Dr. Katherine Bacon. I am testifying in support of SB 114 on behalf of the Texas Counseling Association. Thank you for this opportunity and for your work on this committee.

As a mental health counselor, I advocate for those who don't have a strong voice in this state. Our work is private, difficult, and so very meaningful for providers of care and for our clients. As the TCA volunteer liaison to the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, I have been attending LPC Board and Committee meetings since (year). In this role, I observe the diligent efforts of the Board to manage regulation of the more than 22,000 Licensed Professional Counselors in Texas without an adequate infrastructure to support their work. It is for this reason that TCA supports SB 114.

There are almost 60,000 licensed mental health professionals in Texas. Many of them are dually licensed, that is they hold more than one mental health professional license. This is just one reason that placing each of our licensing boards under the umbrella of the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council makes perfect sense.

This model allows each licensing board to develop substantive rules on standards of care, licensure, educational requirements and disciplinary guidelines for their respective professions. This model would NOT allow the Executive Council or any mental health licensing board to impose standards or modify the scope of practice for any other profession.

SB 114 will not change the composition of any of the licensing boards. It will simply allow for consistency in administration for all mental health boards. It will create a one-stop shop for those who hold dual licenses. It will make it easy for the public to know where to go to find a licensed mental health professional or to file a complaint against one.

The Sunset review identified challenges in the operations of all the mental health licensing boards, including the psychology board. These challenges are more acute for those boards currently housed at the Department of State Health Services, which do not even have a line item or strategy in the state budget. More than half of our license fees revert to general revenue. Staff shortages, the inability of the licensing boards to hire or fire staff, and the low priority of regulation within the DSHS mission all contribute to those challenges.

Without SB 114, those challenges will persist for at least another two years for all licensing boards. Simply extending their sunset date to 2019 will cause Texas to lose momentum. Texas is facing a huge mental health professional workforce shortage. We can't afford to waste any time in creating a system that will expedite licensure and complaint resolutions as well as create a cohesive system of regulation for all mental health professionals.

PLEASE take the recommendations of the Sunset Committee members and the stakeholders who worked so hard, for so long, to propose a true solution to the currently poorly organized administrative processes that just don't serve the public. Please vote for SB 114 and help create a model system for regulation of mental health professionals in Texas.

Thank you.