

IN THE MATTER OF \* BEFORE THE  
\*  
CATHERJNE ABRAMS, \*  
LCSW-C \* MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF  
\* SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS  
\*  
Case No.: 2023-3425 \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

**FINAL DECISION AND ORDER OF REVOCATION  
OF LICENSE TO PRACTICE SOCIAL WORK**

**PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

On or about September 18, 2023 the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners (the "Board") received a complaint regarding the conduct of licensee Catherine Abrams (the "Respondent"), Lie. No. 26279. The complaint alleged that while the Respondent was employed by a correctional facility ("Correctional Facility 1")<sup>1</sup>, the Respondent provided social work services to an incarcerated person ("D.P.") and had a child together after D.P. was released from Correctional Facility 1. Based on the allegations in the complaint, the Board conducted an investigation.

On October 28, 2024 the Board issued Charges Under the Maryland Social Workers Practice Act (the "Charging Document"), charging the Respondent with the following violations of Code of Maryland Annotated Health Occupations §19-311:

- (4) Commits any act of gross negligence, incompetence, or misconduct in the practice of social work;
- (5) Engages in a course of conduct that is inconsistent with generally accepted professional standards in the practice of social work;
- (6) Violates any provision of this title or regulations governing the practice of social work adopted and published by the Board;

The Board also charged the Respondent with violating the following portions of Code of Maryland Regulations ("COMAR") 10.42.03.05:

- A. The licensee may not enter into a dual relationship with a client or an individual with whom the client has a close personal relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> To ensure confidentiality and privacy, the names of individuals, patients and institutions involved in this case are not disclosed in this document.

C. The licensee may enter into a nonsexual relationship with an individual with whom the licensee's prior professional contact:

- (1) Was of a brief, peripheral, or indirect nature; and
- (2) Did not constitute a therapeutic relationship.

D. The licensee may not engage in sexual misconduct with either current or former clients.

The Charging Document provided the Respondent with notice that the Board would schedule the matter for a hearing.

On August 8, 2025 the Board held an evidentiary hearing with a quorum of the Board present. The hearing was conducted virtually utilizing the Google Meet platform. The Respondent was present with their attorney. An Administrative Prosecutor was present on behalf of the State.

### **Evidentiary Exhibits and Witnesses**

The following were admitted as Joint Exhibits:

1. Licensing Information (p. 001-002)
2. Complaint (p. 003-006)
3. Letter to Catherine Abrams and Response (p. 007-012)
4. *Subpoena Duces Tecum* to Maryland Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services and Response - Catherine Abrams Personnel File\* (p. 013-018)
5. *Subpoena Duces Tecum* to Maryland Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services and Response - Client Social Work Records (p. 019-026)
6. *Subpoena Duces Tecum* to Catherine Abrams and Response-Text Messages\* (p.027-030)
7. *Subpoena Duces Tecum* to Catherine Abrams and Response - Birth Certificate (p. 031-032)
8. Interview Transcript with Amanda Cram dated May 14, 2024 (p. 033-040)
9. Interview Transcript with Catherine Abrams dated May 23, 2024 (p. 041-054)
10. Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners Report of Investigation (p. 055-068)
11. Charges Under the Maryland Social Workers Practice Act dated October 28, 2024 (p.069-076)

#### State's Witnesses

1. Amanda Cram

#### Respondent's Witnesses

1. Catherine Abrams

### **FINDINGS OF FACT**

The Board makes the following findings of fact based upon the entirety of the record:

1. On August 19, 2020 the Board issued the Respondent license number 26279 to practice Social Work in the State of Maryland (Joint Exhibit 1, p.001).
2. At the time of the hearing on August 8, 2025, the Respondent's license was valid with an expiration date of October 31, 2025 (Joint Exhibit 1, p.002).
3. Between May 24, 2017 and November 2, 2022 the Respondent was employed by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (the "DPSCS"). (Joint Exhibit 3, p. 008)
4. On March 9, 2021 the Respondent accepted a position as "Social Worker I" within DPSCS and transferred to Correctional Facility 1. (Joint Exhibit 3, p.008)
5. The Respondent was the sole social worker employed at Correctional Facility 1 from March 10, 2021 to November 12, 2022 (Transcript, p. 018).
6. Social Workers with DPSCS utilized the Offender Case Management System to access criminal justice information for clients. (Transcript, p. 017).
7. While working at Correctional Facility 1, the Respondent met an D.P., an incarcerated individual. (Joint Exhibit 3, p.008).
8. The Respondent led a group at Correctional Facility 1 as part of her duties as a social worker called the Victim Impact Listen and Learn Group (the "Victim Impact Group"). (Transcript, p.021)
9. The Victim Impact Group consisted of a facilitator, either a DPSCS social worker or case manager, and incarcerated individuals. (Transcript, p. 022).
10. On September 21, 2021 D.P. signed a contract to participate in the Victim Impact Group (Joint Exhibit 5, p. 021) as well as an Informed Consent form to participate in the Victim Impact Group. (Joint Exhibit 5, p. 023)
11. Any individual client working with a social worker inside DPSCS must sign the informed consent form. (Transcript, p. 026-027)
12. On December 28, 2021 D.P. received a certificate of completion for completing the Victim Impact Group. (Joint Exhibit 5, p. 026)
13. The Respondent completed a Group Member Evaluation for D.P. referencing D.P.'s participation in the Victim Impact Group. (Joint Exhibit 5, p. 025)
14. In a letter dated October 7, 2022 the Respondent resigned from DPSCS effective November 11, 2022. (Joint Exhibit 4, p.016)
15. On September 22, 2023 the Board received a complaint alleging the Respondent was engaged in a sexual relationship with a former client. (Joint Exhibit 2, p. 004)
16. In an interview with the Board's Investigator on May 23, 2024 the Respondent admitted to having a sexual relationship with D.P. as well as having a child with D.P. (Joint Exhibits 7 p.031-032, 9, p.046).

### **Discussion**

#### **The State's Evidence**

The testimony from Amanda Cram made it clear that the Respondent was the only social worker at Correctional Facility 1. (Transcript, p. 018)

The State also provided documentary evidence that the Respondent completed an evaluation for D.P. highlighting D.P.'s "high level of participation" in the Victim Impact Group. (Joint Exhibit 5)

Mrs. Cram also testified that there were no roles in the Victim Impact Group other than a facilitator, in this instance the Respondent, and incarcerated individuals. (Transcript, p. 022).

The State also presented documentary evidence from the Respondent herself in the form of a letter to the Board and an interview transcript in which the Respondent admitted to having a sexual relationship with D.P. (Joint Exhibits 3, 9)

### The Respondent's Evidence

The Respondent's evidence came in the form of her testimony. The Respondent argued that although she had a romantic relationship with D.P., the relationship was permissible because she had never provided D.P. with social work services. Sexual relationships between social workers and clients - current or former - are strictly prohibited pursuant to COMAR 10.42.03.05.D.

#### ***On Direct Examination***

The Respondent testified that she was responsible for facilitating the Victim Impact Group at Correctional Facility 1 which housed 1,800 individuals. (Transcript, p.043-044) Believing that "one group with ten people was a disservice" the Respondent "added two of the soon-to-be peers in...so they could learn how to facilitate that program." (Transcript, p.044) The Respondent testified that she viewed her relationship with the peers as closer to a co-worker and that D.P. was one of these two additional participants she added to the Victim Impact Group. (Transcript, p.043-045) The Respondent also denied providing D.P. with any social work services after D.P. returned from incarceration at Correctional Facility 1. (Transcript, p. 047).

#### ***On Cross Examination***

The Respondent admitted to having a relationship with D.P. after D.P.'s release from Correctional Facility 1. (Transcript, p. 048). The Respondent testified that she did not believe D.P. was her client. (Transcript, p. 044) The Respondent referred to D.P. as one of two individuals "being trained to facilitate the program so they could provide it to other men in the community." (Transcript, p.044).

On cross examination the Respondent testified that D.P. did not complete the assignments as assigned while participating in the Victim Impact Group. (Transcript, p.052) The Respondent admitted that although she testified that D.P. was being trained to be a peer

facilitator, there was no mention of D.P.'s purported training in the Group Member Evaluation form. (Transcript, p. 053-055, Joint Exhibit 5)

**The Respondent was Providing Social Work to D.P.**

The Board places great emphasis on the State's documentary evidence, especially Joint Exhibit 5 which contains the Victim Impact Group participation contract, informed consent form and evaluation. (Joint Exhibit 5, p. 023-026)

The Victim Impact Group was undoubtedly an example of the Respondent practicing social work as defined by the Board's Practice Act. (H.O. § 19-101(n)(1)). The Respondent testified that the Victim Impact Group was

an educational group. It's very, very regulated. Each session, it had a video clip of a victim of a crime and they would share their story. It was split down into sections. Each section was a different crime, I believe, and you would watch the video, and then there was a format for how the rest of the program- how like the rest of that session would go. (Transcript, p. 051)

The Respondent further testified that the assignments during the Victim Impact Group included "lots of journaling". (Transcript, p.052)

The Board found that the work described in the Victim Impact Group undoubtedly included education, which is included in the Board's definition of practicing social work. (H.O. § 19-101(n)(1)).

**The Board was Not Persuaded by Respondent's Claim that D.P. was a Peer Facilitator or Being Trained to Later Act as a Peer Facilitator**

Conversely the Board does not find the Respondent's repeated assertion in both her interview with the Board's investigator and her testimony that D.P.'s participation in the Victim Impact Group was to train D.P. as a future facilitator to be credible. (Transcript, p.052)

Mrs. Cram testified that the *only* two roles in the Victim Impact Group were either a facilitator - a social worker or DPSCS case manager - or an incarcerated individual, but the Respondent completed an evaluation for D.P. as if he were any other participant. (Transcript, p. 022, Joint Exhibit 5, p. 023-026)

The Respondent also testified that she went over the rules and regulations for participating in the Victim Impact Group with D.P. and completed a Group Member Evaluation for D.P. (Transcript, p.053) However, the Respondent claimed that she did not have D.P. complete the assignments as assigned. (Transcript, p. 052)

Despite testifying that D.P. did not complete the assignments as assigned, the Respondent wrote in the Group Member Evaluation for D.P. that D.P. "...attended all sessions and completed all assignments with detailed thought and self-reflection" and was "engaged in every session and eager to share and gain understanding." (Transcript, p.055)

When confronted with the inconsistency between her testimony that D.P. was merely completing assignments as a "facilitator" and the group member evaluation forms, the Respondent conceded there was no mention of this purported training on the Group Member Evaluation. (Transcript, p.055).

It is clear to the Board that despite the Respondent's testimony, D.P. was a participant in the Victim Impact Group and therefore was subject to the ethical restrictions for current and former clients found in the Board's Code of Ethics.

### **The Board Need Not Reach a Conclusion About Whether Other Actions Constituted the Practice of Social Work**

The Board heard testimony from the Respondent about forms that D.P. completed in order to obtain a Social Security card and Birth Certificate. (Transcript, p. 049). The Respondent denied that she provided the forms to D.P. as a "social worker", instead insisting on cross examination that she merely "printed" the forms as a social worker. (Transcript, p.049). The Board does not need to examine whether those actions constituted practicing social work within the definition of H.O. § 19-101(n)(1) because the Respondent leading the Victim Impact Group is sufficient to find she was practicing social work with D.P.

### **The Respondent Engaged in a Prohibited Romantic Relationship with D.P.**

By the Respondent's own admission, she engaged in a romantic relationship with D.P. (Transcript, p.061). Pursuant to COMAR 10.42.03.05.D the Respondent was prohibited from engaging in a sexual relationship with D.P.

Upon consideration of the preceding Findings of Fact the Board has no doubt that the Respondent provided social work services to D.P. and as a result violated H.O. §19-311(4), (5) and (6) as well as COMAR 10.42.03.05 by beginning a sexual relationship with a former client.

### **Sanctioning Guidelines**

The Respondent's violation falls under the Board's sanctioning guidelines located at Code of Maryland Regulations at COMAR 10.42.09.04.

The guidelines for sexual misconduct range from a reprimand or a \$200 fine, or both to revocation or a \$10,000 fine, or both.

The guidelines for violations of COMAR 10.42.03, the Code of Ethics, range from a reprimand or a \$200 fine, or both to revocation or a \$10,000 fine, or both.

The guidelines for committing any act of gross negligence, incompetence, or misconduct in the practice of social work range from probation for 1 year or a \$1,000 fine, or both to revocation or a \$10,000 fine, or both.

The guidelines for knowingly violating any provision of the Board's Practice Act range from probation for 1 year or a \$1,000 fine, or both to revocation or a \$10,000 fine, or both.

The guidelines for engaging in a course of conduct inconsistent with the generally accepted professional standards in the practice of social work range from probation for 1 year or a \$1,000 fine, or both to revocation or a \$10,000 fine, or both.

### **Determination of Appropriate Sanction**

In determining an appropriate sanction in this case, the Board has considered the entirety of the record consisting of testimony from witnesses and exhibits submitted by the State and the Respondent.

The Board must consider the Mitigating and Aggravating factors in COMAR 10.42.09.05 when determining the appropriate sanction.

The Board finds that the Respondent's lack of prior disciplinary record is the only Mitigating Factor in this case.

The Board finds several Aggravating Factors apply in this case. The Board finds that the Respondent's conduct was committed deliberately. The Board finds that the Respondent's conduct had the potential for serious patient harm and was a pattern of detrimental conduct. The Board also finds that because D.P.'s status as a formerly incarcerated individual made him a vulnerable client.

The Respondent may not have described her actions as practicing social work or acknowledge that D.P. was a *participant* in the Victim Impact Group, but those self-serving characterizations do not persuade the Board. (Transcript, p.043-045). The Respondent crossed a clear ethical boundary by engaging in a romantic relationship with D.P.

Finally, the Board has considered its obligation to protect the public. In doing so, the Board finds that revocation is an appropriate sanction under these circumstances. At best the Respondent was incompetent to the point that she did not understand that having D.P. in the Victim Impact Group constituted practicing social work in a group setting. At worst, the Respondent was fully aware of the professional relationship she had with D.P. and attempted to mislead the Board by later claiming she was training D.P. to act as a "peer" despite no records

of this arrangement or there being a role for a "peer" in the Victim Impact Group. Accordingly, the Board will revoke the Respondent's license to practice social work.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Board concludes, as a matter of law, that the Respondent violated Md. Code. Ann., Health. Occ. §19-311:

Subject to the hearing provisions of§ 19-312 of this subtitle, the Board may deny a license to any applicant, fine a licensee, reprimand any licensee, place any licensee on probation, or suspend or revoke a license if the applicant or licensee:

(4) Commits any act of gross negligence, incompetence, or misconduct in the practice of social work;

(5) Engages in a course of conduct that is inconsistent with generally accepted professional standards in the practice of social work;

(6) Violates any provision of this title or regulations governing the practice of social work adopted and published by the Board;...

The Board also concludes as a matter of law that the Respondent violated the following portions of Code of Maryland Regulations ("COMAR") 10.42.03.05:

A. The licensee may not enter into a dual relationship with a client or an individual with whom the client has a close personal relationship.

C. The licensee may enter into a nonsexual relationship with an individual with whom the licensee's prior professional contact:

- (1) Was of a brief, peripheral, or indirect nature; and
- (2) Did not constitute a therapeutic relationship.

D. The licensee may not engage in sexual misconduct with either current or former clients.

### **ORDER**

Based upon the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, by quorum of the Board it is hereby:

**ORDERED** that the Respondent's license to practice Social Work in the State of Maryland, Lic. No. 26279., is hereby **REVOKED**; and it is further

**ORDERED** that this Order is a **PUBLIC RECORD** under Md. Code Ann., General Provisions §§ 4-101 et seq. (2019).

October 14, 2025



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Date

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Kevin Meenan, LCSW-C  
Board Chair  
Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners

### **NOTICE OF APPEAL RIGHTS**

Any person aggrieved by a Final Decision of the Board under Md. Code Ann., H.O. §19-311 may file a petition for judicial review in the Circuit Court within thirty (30) days pursuant to Md. Code Ann. H.O. §19-313, State Gov't §10-222, and Title 7, Chapter 200 of the Maryland Rules, including Md. Rule 7-203 ("Time for Filing Action").