

IN THE MATTER OF

SHEILA M. ISHII, LCSW-C

RESPONDENT

License Number: 10659

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BEFORE THE MARYLAND

STATE BOARD OF

SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS

**Case Numbers: 2024-3651
2024-3657
2024-3658**

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**ORDER FOR SUMMARY SUSPENSION
OF LICENSE TO PRACTICE SOCIAL WORK**

The Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners (the “Board”) hereby **SUMMARILY SUSPENDS** the license of **SHEILA M. ISHII, LCSW-C** (the “Respondent”), License Number 10659, to practice social work of any form in the State of Maryland.

The Board takes such action pursuant to its authority under Md. Code Ann., State Gov’t § 10-226(c) (2021 Repl. Vol. & 2024 Supp.), and Md. Code Regs. (“COMAR”) 10.42.04.07, concluding that the public health, safety or welfare imperatively requires emergency action.

INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

Based on information received by, and made known to the Board, and the investigatory information obtained by, received by and made known to and available to the

Board, including the instances described below, the Board has reason to believe that the following facts are true:¹

I. BACKGROUND

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent was and is licensed to practice clinical social work in the State of Maryland. The Respondent initially was licensed to practice graduate/master social work in Maryland on September 17, 1997, under License Number G07823. The Respondent became licensed to practice clinical social work in Maryland on March 17, 2000, under License Number 10659. The Respondent's license expires on October 31, 2026, subject to renewal.

2. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent owns and practices clinical social work at a counseling center (the "Center")² in Ellicott City, Maryland.

II. THE COMPLAINTS

3. In or around early December 2024, the Board initiated an investigation after receiving a self-report from the Respondent and two complaints against her, one from a licensed social worker (the "Social Worker") in Maryland and another from a client (the "Client") of the Respondent.

¹ The statements regarding the Board's investigative findings are intended to provide the Respondent with reasonable notice of the basis of the suspension. They are not intended as, and do not necessarily represent, a complete description of the evidence, either documentary or testimonial, to be offered against the Respondent in connection with this matter.

² To ensure confidentiality, the names of individuals, hospitals and healthcare facilities involved in this case are not disclosed in this document. The Respondent may obtain the identity of the referenced individuals or entities in this document by contacting the administrative prosecutor.

4. In a self-report, dated December 6, 2024, the Respondent stated, "I am humbly reporting myself for having violated the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners Code of Ethics in my care of my client during the latter course of our psychotherapy of 4 and $\frac{3}{4}$ yrs." The Respondent went on to describe the progression of her relationship with a client (the "Client") and how it became increasingly unethical to include the near constant communication with the Client through emails and texting, the increase in the frequency and duration of counseling sessions, and the initiation of therapeutic touching that became unethical touching. The Board initiated an investigation under Board Case Number 2024-3651.

5. In a written complaint, dated December 6, 2024, the Social Worker reported that in a consultation appointment on September 3, 2024, the Respondent disclosed to the Social Worker that she had egregious boundary violations with the Client for three to four years. The Social Worker further stated that he recommended that the Respondent self-report the incident to the Board, which the Respondent agreed. The Board initiated an investigation of the Respondent under Board Case Number 2024-3657.

6. In a written complaint, dated December 16, 2024, the Client alleged that over a treatment period of four-years and ten-months, the Respondent engaged in sexual misconduct and committed serious ethical violations. The alleged misconduct against the Respondent included but was not limited to: inappropriate and excessive communications through emails and text messaging outside of therapy sessions; prolonged periods of physical embrace during therapy sessions; intimate kissing while holding each other during therapy sessions; and reenactments of the Client's birth that included having the Client

suckling the Respondent's breasts during therapy sessions. The Board initiated an investigation of the Respondent under Board Case Number 2024-3658.

III. BOARD INVESTIGATION

7. The Board's investigation included, but was not limited to, obtaining a written response from the Respondent, obtaining copies of the emails and text messages between the Respondent and the Client, and interviewing the Client, the Social Worker and the Respondent under-oath.

8. The Board's investigation revealed that over a period of four-years and ten-months of providing therapy to the Client, the Respondent engaged in sexual misconduct and committed egregious boundary violations that included but were not limited to: inappropriate and excessive communications through emails and text messaging with the Client outside of therapy sessions; prolonged periods of physical embrace of the Client during therapy sessions; engaging in intimate kissing with the Client during therapy sessions; and reenacting the Client's birth that included having the Client while semi-undressed suckling the Respondent's breasts during therapy sessions.

9. The Respondent and Client's professional relationship began on or about January 12, 2020, when the Client sought therapy from the Respondent for issues involving same-sex attraction. The Client was in her early 50s then and was married with a husband and two adult children. The Client was worried that she may be entering into a sexual relationship with a same-sex friend and sought help from the Respondent to save her marriage.

10. From approximately 2020 to 2022, the Respondent provided therapy to the Client to help her “separate” from the same-sex friend. The therapy sessions were generally once a week with each session lasting approximately 45 minutes. The only communications outside of the therapy sessions were pre-therapy notes that the Client would email to the Respondent prior to an upcoming session, which the Respondent would review but not reply. The Respondent noted that the Client responded well to the therapy sessions and was able to “separate” herself from the same-sex friend.

11. Toward the end of 2022, the Client began to notice changes in her professional relationship with the Respondent. The Respondent and the Client began communicating outside of therapy sessions through emails and text messaging. The Respondent also introduced holding and touching each other while clothed as part of the therapy but discontinued it after a couple of sessions.

12. Beginning around early 2023 and forward, the Client began seeing the Respondent twice a week with each session lasting much longer than the usual 45 minutes. The emailing and text messaging outside of therapy sessions between the Respondent and the Client also became progressively more frequent. These emails and text messages often contained intimate expressions of affection between the Respondent and the Client including expressions of love. By around March of 2023, the Respondent and the Client texted each other first thing in the morning, multiple times during the day, and right before they went to sleep.

13. In or around June of 2023, the Client began seeing the Respondent three times a week with each session lasting one-and-one-half to two hours. The Respondent

began to see herself as a surrogate mother to the Client while the Client saw herself as the Respondent's child. The Respondent also reintroduced the practice of holding and touching each other as part of therapy. These sessions would begin and end with the Respondent and the Client holding each other while standing for 15 to 20 minutes. It then progressed to the Respondent holding and cradling the Client on the couch during the session. At some point, the Respondent and the Client began intimately kissing each other on the mouth while the Respondent held the Client on the couch. During her Board interview, the Respondent admitted that the kissing became sexual at one point.

14. According to the Respondent's Board interview, in or around August or September 2023, the Respondent had a dream in which she and the Client reenacted the Client's birth. During a therapy session on or about September 26, 2023, the Respondent, in her underwear only, and the Client, in her underwear and bra, reenacted the Client's birth with the Respondent lying on the floor and the Client on top of the Respondent suckling the Respondent's breast. The same birth reenactment took place again during the therapy session that occurred on or about September 28, 2023, but was discontinued afterward.

15. From around October 2023 until October 2024, the Client continued to see the Respondent twice a week for therapy. During these sessions, the Respondent continued to hold and cradle the Client on the couch for a prolonged period of time as part of therapy. The inappropriate email and text message exchanges between the Respondent and the Client also continued, though in progressively less frequency.

16. On or about September 3, 2024, the Respondent had a consultation with the Social Worker during which she disclosed her egregious boundary violations with the Client and sought help for her and the Client. The Social Worker recommended that the Respondent terminate her relationship with the Client. The Respondent and the Client also sought advice from a mutual acquaintance from their ministry, who also recommended that they terminate their relationship. The Client's last individual session with the Respondent occurred on October 1, 2024.

17. Throughout her Board interview that took place on February 6, 2025, the Respondent admitted to having committed egregious boundary violations with the Client. The Respondent stated, "[the Client] was my Christian sister and I exposed her to sexual temptations. And it was – I was in denial and unable until later to agree with her, because she tried to talk with me a couple of times about it, about this isn't right... And I apologize each time I came upon a realization of where I had been wrong. I apologized, but I didn't go far enough. And that was my pride. That was my fear, my pride, my terror in where I had gone."

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the foregoing Investigative Findings, the Board concludes as a matter of law that the public health, safety, or welfare imperatively requires emergency action, and that pursuant to Md. Code Ann., State Gov't § 10-226(c)(2) (2021 Repl. Vol. and 2024 Supp.) and Md. Code Regs. ("COMAR") 10.42.04.07, the Respondent's license is summarily suspended.

ORDER

It is, by a majority of the Board, hereby:

ORDERED that pursuant to the authority vested in the Board by Md. Code Ann., State Gov't § 10-226(c)(2) and COMAR 10.42.04.07, the Respondent's license to practice social work in the State of Maryland is hereby **SUMMARILY SUSPENDED**; and it is further

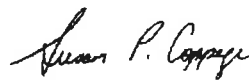
ORDERED that, during the course of the summary suspension, the Respondent shall not practice social work in the State of Maryland; and it is further

ORDERED that in accordance with COMAR 10.42.04.07D, a virtual post-deprivation hearing on the summary suspension will be held on **Friday, May 9, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.** before the Board at the Board's offices, located at 4201 Patterson Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21215; and it is further

ORDERED that at the conclusion of the post-deprivation hearing before the Board, the Respondent, if dissatisfied with the result of the hearing, may request within ten (10) days an evidentiary hearing, such hearing to be set within forty-five (45) days of the request; and it is further

ORDERED that this is an Order of the Board, and as such, is a **PUBLIC DOCUMENT**. See Md. Code Ann., Gen. Provisions § 4-333(b)(6).

April 25, 2025



Date

Susan Coppage, LCSW-C
Board Chair
Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiner