

IN THE MATTER OF * **BEFORE THE MARYLAND**
JOEL LIGHTFOOT LCSW-C * **STATE BOARD OF**
RESPONDENT * **SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS**
License Number: 14423 * **Case Number: 2020-2887**

* * * * *

ORDER FOR SUMMARY SUSPENSION

The Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners (the “Board”) hereby **SUMMARILY SUSPENDS** the license of **JOEL LIGHTFOOT LCSW-C** (the “Respondent”), License Number 14423, to practice social work in the State of Maryland. The Board takes such action pursuant to its authority under Md. Code Ann., State Gov’t § 10-226(c)(2) (2014 Repl. Vol. & 2020 Supp.) and Md. Code Regs. (“COMAR”) 10.42.04.07(D), concluding that the public health, safety, or welfare imperatively requires emergency action.

INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

The Board makes the following findings:¹

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent was licensed to practice clinical social work in the State of Maryland. The Respondent was initially licensed as a licensed certified social worker-clinical (“LCSW-C”) in Maryland on or about December 16, 2011 under license number 14423. The Respondent’s license expires on October 31, 2021. The Respondent also holds an active status as a Board-approved supervisor.

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

2. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent owned and operated a counseling center located in Harford County, Maryland (the “Center”).²

Complaint

3. On or about September 29, 2020, the Board received an email (the “Complaint”) from a Bel Air Police Department detective (the “Complainant”) that the Respondent was under investigation based on a complaint filed with Child Protective Services (“CPS”) related to one of the Respondent’s juvenile clients (the “Client”).

4. Based on the Complaint, the Board began an investigation.

Investigation

5. In furtherance of its investigation, the Board obtained records from the Department of Social Services and the Center as well as conducted interviews.

6. According to records received from the Center, the Respondent conducted a psychiatric diagnostic evaluation of and provided psychotherapy sessions to the Client on October 15, 2019; October 30, 2019; November 14, 2019; December 5, 2019; and December 12, 2019.

7. On or about September 23, 2020, the Client’s mother (the “Mother”) reported to CPS that the Client disclosed that the Respondent touched the Client inappropriately and made inappropriate comments to the Client during their therapy sessions.

8. After CPS received the report, it initiated an investigation.

² For purposes of ensuring confidentiality, health care facility and proper names have been omitted and replaced with generic placeholders. Upon written request, the Administrative Prosecutor will provide the information to the Respondent.

9. During the course of the CPS investigation,³ on September 24, 2020, a social worker from CPS (the “CPS Investigator”) and the Complainant interviewed the Client. During the interview the Client reported that during her sessions with the Respondent, the Respondent:

would make inappropriate comments to her like, “if I wasn’t with my wife, and you were older, I would be with you.” [The Client] also reported that he touched her on her inner thigh, chest and butt. She explained that during sessions, she would sit on the couch in his office and he would sit in a chair across from her. She said he would get up and come over and sit next to her on the couch, putting his hand on her thigh. This happened approximately three times. . . . [The Client] said that when she would exit his office, she would be in front of him and he would grab her butt as she walked out. This happened approximately two times. She couldn’t remember details regarding him touching her chest. . . .

10. On or about October 30, 2020, the Department of Social Services notified the Respondent that they made a finding that child sexual abuse was indicated⁴ and that the Respondent was the person found responsible for the indicated sexual abuse of the Client.⁵

³ During the course of the CPS investigation the CPS Investigator and the Complainant attempted to obtain a statement from the Respondent. However, the Respondent declined to provide them with a statement.

⁴ “Indicated” “means a finding that there is credible evidence, which has not been satisfactorily refuted, that abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse did occur.” Md. Code Ann., Fam. Law § 5-701(m) (2019 Repl. Vol. & 2020 Supp.). *See also* COMAR 07.02.07.11(A)(2).

⁵ Pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Fam. Law § 5-706.1, Respondent has 60 days to file an appeal of the finding. If the Respondent unsuccessfully appeals the finding or fails to exercise his appeal rights within the required time frame, the Respondent may be identified as an individual responsible for abuse in the Social Services Administration’s centralized confidential database. *See* Md. Code Ann., Fam. Law § 5-714(d).

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based on the foregoing investigative findings, and pursuant to its authority under Md. Code Ann., State Gov't § 10-226(c)(2) (2014 Repl. Vol. & 2020 Supp.) and COMAR 10.42.04.07, the Board concludes as a matter of law that there is a substantial likelihood that the Respondent poses a risk of harm to the public health, safety, or welfare. In addition, pursuant to COMAR 10.42.04.07(D), the Board concludes that the public health, safety, and welfare imperatively requires the immediate suspension of the Respondent's license to practice social work in Maryland.

ORDER

Based on the foregoing Investigative Findings and Conclusions of Law, it is by 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 the Respondent has the opportunity to appear before the Board at a post-deprivation show cause hearing to show cause why the suspension should not be continued. The show cause hearing has been scheduled for **February 12, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.** at the Board's offices at 4201 Patterson Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21215. If the Respondent does not attend either in person or through counsel, the Board will continue the suspension of his license; and it is further

ORDERED that the Respondent may request an evidentiary hearing on the merits of this matter. The request must be in writing and be made **WITHIN TEN (10) DAYS** of service of this Order. If no such written request is made, the suspension will continue indefinitely. The written request should be made to:

Stanley E. Weinstein, Ph.D., LCSW-C
Executive Director
Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners
4201 Patterson Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21215

with copies mailed to:

Kelly Cooper, Assistant Attorney General
Health Occupations Prosecution and Litigation Division
Office of the Attorney General
300 West Preston Street, Suite 201
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
Kelly.cooper@maryland.gov

Rhonda Edwards, Assistant Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General
300 West Preston Street, Suite 302
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

and it is further

ORDERED that the Respondent shall immediately surrender to the Board his original LCSW-C license number 14423, and any other official indicia of licensure; and it is further

ORDERED that this is an Order of the Board, and as such, is a **PUBLIC DOCUMENT** pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Gen. Prov. § 4-101 *et seq.* (2019 Repl. Vol. & 2020 Supp.).

01/28/2021



Date

Gerard Farrell
Board Chair
MD State Board of Social Work Examiners