

IN THE MATTER OF	*	BEFORE THE MARYLAND
CHRISTA W. BELLANCA, LMSW	*	STATE BOARD OF
Respondent	*	SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS
License Number: 22987	*	Case Number: 2018-2533

\* \* \* \* \*

**CONSENT ORDER**

On or about April 29, 2021, the Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners (the “Board”) charged **CHRISTA W. BELLANCA, LMSW** (the “Respondent”), License Number 22987, with violating the Maryland Social Workers Act (the “Act”), Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. (“Health Occ.”) §§ 19-101 *et seq.* (2014 Repl. Vol. and 2020 Supp.) (the “Act”).

The Board based its action on the following provisions of the Act:

**Health Occ. § 19-311 Grounds for license denials, discipline.**

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; [and/or]

**Health—General § 4-309 Violations of Subtitle.**

(c) *Disclosure violations*—A health care provider or any other person is in violation of this subtitle if the health care provider or any other person:

(1) Requests or obtains a medical record under false pretenses or through deception[.]

### FINDINGS OF FACT<sup>1</sup>

The Board finds the following facts.

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

1. At all times relevant to these charges, the Respondent was and is licensed to practice social work in the State of Maryland. The Board originally issued a license to the Respondent on June 19, 2017, under License Number 22987. The Respondent's license is current through October 31, 2021.
2. At all times relevant to these charges, the Respondent was employed as a Mobile Crisis Team Worker II on a contingent part time basis by a mental health services provider (the "Provider")<sup>2</sup> located in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. At all times relevant to these charges, the Respondent was employed as an Outreach Specialist by a school system (the "School") located in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

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<sup>1</sup> The statements of the Respondent's conduct herein are intended to provide the Respondent with reasonable notice of the asserted facts. 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 these charges.

<sup>2</sup> To ensure confidentiality, the names of any clients or health care providers will not be used in this document. The Respondent may obtain this information by contacting the assigned administrative prosecutor.

## II. THE COMPLAINT

3. On or about August 15, 2018, the Board received a complaint (the “Complaint”) from the Provider stating that the Respondent was terminated on July 20, 2018 for accessing confidential health records through the Provider’s electronic health record database (“EHR”) without authorization and other “unprofessional behavior.” The Complaint contained a log<sup>3</sup> documenting that the Respondent engaged in unauthorized access of client and program records approximately one hundred seven (107) times over a two-month period including when she was not on duty. After reviewing the Complaint, the Board initiated an investigation of this matter. In furtherance of the investigation, the Board interviewed witnesses, subpoenaed and reviewed human resources records, and obtained and reviewed internal documents and correspondence. The results of the Board’s investigation are set forth *infra*.

## III. INVESTIGATIVE ALLEGATIONS

### **Unauthorized Access of Confidential Records Under False Pretenses**

4. On or about October 7, 2013, the Respondent commenced employment with the School. On or about March 19, 2018, the Respondent commenced employment with the Provider, and consequently, gained login access to the

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<sup>3</sup> Whenever access is made to the Provider’s EHR, a record of the date and time of access, the identity of the accessing individual, and the specific documents accessed is made and kept in the system.

Provider's EHR. The Respondent signed a "Confidentiality Statement," which read, "All persons are expected to follow applicable State confidentiality statutes and regulations regarding patient information." As a Mobile Crisis Team Worker II, the Respondent was not authorized to access the Provider's EHR unless she was assigned to respond to a specific client or crisis situation.

5. On or about July 17, 2018, during a staff meeting, the Respondent stated that she had accessed the Provider's EHR to identify the victims of a high profile shooting in Annapolis while she was on vacation from the end of June to the beginning of July 2018. The Respondent later claimed that she accessed the confidential records to determine whether she needed to return from vacation early and that she communicated with her supervisor on the day in question. The Respondent's supervisor had no recollection or record of any such communication with the Respondent.
6. The Respondent's employment with the School did not require her to access the Provider's EHR nor was she assigned any cases or projects involving the School. During the course of her employment with the Provider, the Respondent engaged in unauthorized access of protected health information approximately one hundred seven (107) times, including, but not limited to:

- a. On or about May 7, 2018, the Respondent accessed the Provider's EHR to view confidential records of clients at the School when the Respondent was off duty.
  - b. On or about May 19, 2018, the Respondent accessed the Provider's EHR to view confidential records of clients in Provider programs to which she was not assigned.
  - c. On or about June 4, 2018, the Respondent accessed the Provider's EHR to view confidential records of clients at the School and clients in Provider programs to which she was not assigned.
  - d. On or about June 8, 2018, the Respondent accessed the Provider's EHR to view confidential records of clients to whom she was not assigned when the Respondent was off duty.
  - e. On or about June 28, 2018, the Respondent accessed the Provider's EHR to view confidential records of clients involved in a high profile shooting in Annapolis when the Respondent was on vacation out of state.
  - f. On or about July 18, 2018, after being verbally warned by her supervisor not to access confidential client records, the Respondent accessed the Provider's EHR to view sixty-five (65) confidential notes involving a client to whom she had not been assigned.
7. The Respondent later claimed that she accessed the confidential records for training purposes with the encouragement of her supervisor. The

Respondent's supervisor explained that the authorization to access records for training was only in effect during the initial training process, which ended months prior to the Respondent's unauthorized access.

8. Board staff interviewed the Respondent under oath and asked the Respondent, "[D]o you accept responsibility for accessing electronic health records at times you should not have accessed them?" The Respondent replied, "Yes, I do."

### CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Board concludes as a matter of law that the Respondent's actions, as described above, constitute in whole or in part, a violation of the above-cited provisions of the Act.

### ORDER

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby by a majority of the Board members considering this case

**ORDERED** that the Respondent is **REPRIMANDED**; and it is further

**ORDERED** that the Respondent is placed on Board-supervised **PROBATION** for a period of at least **EIGHTEEN (18) MONTHS** and until the following terms and conditions are fully and satisfactorily complied with:

1. The Respondent's status as a licensed social worker will be listed in the Board's computer records and website as being on "Probation";
2. Within 6 months of the effective date of the Consent Order, the Respondent shall submit documentation to the Board showing that she has successfully completed

and a course, approved by the Board in advance, in professional ethics. The course shall be in-person (or, if in-person courses are not available due to the COVID-related restrictions, then by video-conference). The course shall not count towards the Respondent's Continuing Education requirements for renewal of licensure;

3. Within 6 months of the effective date of the Consent Order, the Respondent shall submit documentation to the Board showing that she has successfully completed and a course, approved by the Board in advance, in client confidentiality. The course shall be in-person (or, if in-person courses are not available due to the COVID-related restrictions, then by video-conference). The course shall not count towards the Respondent's Continuing Education requirements for renewal of licensure;
4. Within 6 months of the effective date of the Consent Order, the Respondent shall pay a monetary penalty of \$500; and
5. The Respondent shall practice social work according to the Maryland Social Work Act and in accordance with all applicable laws, statutes and regulations pertaining to the practice of social work.

And it is further

**ORDERED** that nothing in the Consent Order shall be construed to preclude the Respondent from applying for her next level of licensure when otherwise qualified to do so; and it is further

**ORDERED** that the Respondent shall not serve or continue to serve as: a Board-authorized sponsor, presenter, and/or trainer of social work continuing education learning activities, an ethics tutor, an evaluator for the Board, or a Board-approved supervisor for a period of 5 (five) years from the effective date of this Consent Order; and it is further

**ORDERED** that after eighteen (18) months from the date of this Consent Order, the Respondent may submit a written petition to the Board requesting termination of probation. After consideration of the petition, the probation may be terminated, through an order of the Board, or a designated Board committee. The Board, or designated Board committee, will grant the termination if the Respondent has fully and satisfactorily complied with all of the probationary terms and conditions and there are no pending complaints related to the charges; and it is further

**ORDERED** that if the Respondent violates any of the terms and conditions of this Consent Order, the Board, in its discretion, after notice and an opportunity for a show cause hearing before the Board, may impose any sanction which the Board may have imposed in this case, including a probationary term and conditions of probation, reprimand, suspension, lifting the stay of suspension, revocation and/or a monetary penalty, said allegations of violation of the terms and condition of this Consent Order shall be proven by a preponderance of the evidence; and it is further

**ORDERED** that the Respondent is solely responsible for all costs incurred in fulfilling the terms and conditions of the Consent Order; and it is further

**ORDERED** that this Consent Order is a **PUBLIC DOCUMENT**, pursuant to Md. Code Ann., State Gov't §§ 10-611 *et seq.* (2014 Repl. Vol.), and is reportable to any entity to which the Board is obligated to report.



9/10/2021

Date



Karen Richards, MSW, LCSW-C  
Board Chair  
Maryland State Board of Social Work  
Examiners

**CONSENT**

I, Christa Bellanca, LMSW, acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to consult with counsel before signing this document. By this Consent, I accept to be bound by this Consent Order and its conditions and restrictions. I waive any rights I may have had to contest the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

I acknowledge the validity of this Consent Order as if entered into after the conclusion of a formal evidentiary hearing in which I would have had the right to counsel, to confront witnesses, to give testimony, to call witnesses on my own behalf, and to all other substantive and procedural protections as provided by law. I acknowledge the legal authority and the jurisdiction of the Board to initiate these proceedings and to issue and enforce this Consent Order. I also affirm that I waive my right to appeal any adverse ruling of the Board that might have followed any such hearing.

I sign this Consent Order after having had an opportunity to consult with counsel, without reservation, and I fully understand and comprehend the language, meaning and terms of this Consent Order. I voluntarily sign this Order, and understand its meaning and effect.

8/3/21  
Date

Christa W. Bellanca  
Christa Bellanca, LMSW  
The Respondent

NOTARY

STATE OF Maryland

CITY/COUNTY OF:

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on this 3 day of August, 2021, before me, a Notary Public of the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Christa Bellanca, LMSW, and gave oath in due form of law that the foregoing Consent Order was her voluntary act and deed.

AS WITNESS, my hand and Notary Seal.



Notary Public



My commission expires: 01/15/2023