

IN THE MATTER OF

*** BEFORE THE MARYLAND**

MARIA A. HOCKER, LCSW-C

*** STATE BOARD OF**

Respondent

*** SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS**

License Number: 11190

*** Case Numbers: 2021-2968 & 2021-2969**

* * * * *

CONSENT ORDER

On January 28, 2022, the Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners (the “Board”) charged **MARIA A. HOCKER** (the “Respondent”), License Number **11190**, with violating the Maryland Social Workers Act (the “Act”) codified at Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. §§ 19-101 *et seq.* (2021 Repl. Vol.).

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 provision 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;

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

(21) Fails to comply with the maintenance, disclosure, and destruction of medical records as required under Title 4, Subtitles 3 and 4 of the Health—General Article.

Pursuant to Health Occ. § 19-311(6), the pertinent provisions of Md. Code Regs. (“COMAR”) provide the following:

COMAR 10.42.03.03 Responsibilities to Clients.

- A. The licensee shall:
 - (5) Maintain documentation in the client’s record which:
 - (g) Ensures that no confidential information is disseminated and identities are protected when using technology to communicate or access client information.
- B. The licensee may not:
 - (6) Engage or participate in an action that violates or diminishes the civil or legal rights of a client;
 - (7) Share with another individual a confidence revealed by a client without a client’s consent[.]

On May 23, 2022, the parties appeared at a Case Resolution Conference (“CRC”) before a committee of the Board. The Respondent, represented by counsel, and the Administrative Prosecutor assigned to the case participated in the CRC. As a result of the negotiations at the CRC, the parties agreed to the following Consent Order consisting of Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Board finds the following:

I. BACKGROUND

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent was licensed to practice clinical social work in the State of Maryland. The Respondent was originally licensed to

practice as a licensed certified social worker - clinical (“LCSW-C”) in Maryland on August 1, 2001. The Respondent’s license expired on October 31, 2020. The Respondent’s license is currently non-renewed.

2. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent practiced clinical social work at a facility (the “Facility”)¹ located in Wicomico County, Maryland.

3. On or about May 5, 2021, the Board received a complaint from one of the Respondent’s former clients. The complainant is the father (the “Father”) of another one of the Respondent’s former clients, who was a minor (“Child A”) when he was a client. The Father’s complaint alleged that the Respondent was hired to provide reunification services for Child A and one of the Father’s other minor children (“Child B”).

4. The complaint alleged that the Respondent shared false information and confidential information about the Father, Child A, Child A’s grandfather (the “Grandfather”), and Child B that the Respondent learned while providing reunification therapy to the family. The complaint alleged that the Respondent improperly shared false and confidential information with Child Protective Services (“CPS”), and that the Respondent improperly shared false and confidential information with an attorney who was representing the mother of Child B in a separate legal matter with the Father regarding child custody.

5. On or about May 5, 2021, the Board received a complaint from one of the Respondent’s former clients, Child A, who was a minor during the time he received

¹ For confidentiality reasons, the names of all facilities, employees, or other individuals referenced in this document will not be identified by name.

services from the Respondent.² The complaint alleged that the Respondent was hired to provide reunification services for Child A and his half-sister, Child B.

6. Child A's complaint alleged that the Respondent improperly shared false information and confidential information about Child A, Child A's Father, Child A's Grandfather, and Child B that the Respondent learned while providing reunification therapy to the family. The complaint alleged that the Respondent improperly shared false and confidential information with CPS, and that the Respondent improperly shared false and confidential information with an attorney who was representing the mother of Child B in a separate legal matter with the Father regarding child custody.

7. Based on the information provided in the complaints, the Board initiated an investigation.

II. BOARD INVESTIGATION

8. On or about July 12, 2021, the Board received a written response to the complaint from the Respondent's attorney. In the letter, the Respondent's attorney stated that the Respondent shared the information described in the complaint with CPS and in a letter to Child B's mother's attorney, as mentioned in the complaint.

7. The Board's investigator interviewed the Father under oath on June 22, 2021. During that interview, the Father stated:

- a. The Father went to the Facility to obtain reunification therapy for his two minor children, Child A and Child B. The Respondent worked at

² At the time of the filing of the complaint with the Board, the complainant was no longer a minor.

the Facility and was assigned to work with the Father and his children. The Respondent began providing reunification therapy.

- b. The Respondent would conduct sessions with “just the kids,” sometimes with the group, and sometimes she would meet with the family members individually.
- c. The Respondent interviewed the Grandfather, as well as the Father’s mother, and the Father’s current wife.
- b. After some time, the Respondent told the Father, “[W]ell, you guys are done, but to . . . for us to release it, you’re going to have to have psychological profiles at 6,500 dollars a piece, approximately.” The Father, the Grandfather, and Child A decided not to get the testing done at the Facility.
- c. The Respondent then filed a complaint with CPS in which the Respondent included sensitive information about Child A, Child B, and other family members that she claimed to have learned while providing reunification therapy to Child A and Child B. CPS “did an investigation and found nothing.”
- d. On or about May 14, 2018, the Respondent wrote a letter to Child B’s mother’s attorney that included sensitive information that was included in the report to CPS, as well as other sensitive information about Child A, Child B, the Father, and the Grandfather that the

Respondent claimed to have learned while providing reunification therapy. The letter to the attorney included information that “isn’t true,” as well as information that was “never authorized for release[.]”

- e. As a result of the Respondent’s letter to Child B’s mother’s attorney, Child B’s mother “filed an emergency hearing,” which led to the limitation of the Grandfather’s unsupervised visitation with Child B.
- f. The Father and Grandfather have been unable to get medical records of the reunification therapy from the Facility.

8. The Board’s investigator interviewed the Grandfather under oath on June 28, 2021. During that interview, the Grandfather stated:

- a. The Grandfather’s grandchildren—Child A and Child B—went to the Respondent for reunification therapy.
- b. The Respondent said that “when she treats children, she treats the whole family,” so she insisted on seeing the Father, the Father’s ex-wife, Child A, and Child B, as well as the Grandfather and his wife.
- c. The Respondent told the Grandfather “in one of [their] sessions, that she wanted [him] to have a psychological exam done[.]”
- d. At first, the Respondent would not tell the Grandfather how much the exam was going to cost. After the Grandfather consulted with an attorney, the Respondent told the grandfather that it will cost

“around 2,300 or 2,500 dollars per person.” The Grandfather told the Respondent that they are not going to do that.

- e. “[T]he very next day,” the Respondent “made the false accusations” about the Grandfather harming his grandchildren. The Respondent reported these accusations to CPS, and CPS “found nothing to substantiate the allegations.”
- f. The Respondent then wrote a letter to Child B’s mother’s attorney “detailing the same allegations . . . along with a lot of other things that weren’t . . . true or accurate.” The Grandfather did not give the Respondent permission to release information to the attorney.
- g. The Respondent “released information about [the Grandfather] that she obtained through [their] therapy sessions.”

9. The Board’s investigator interviewed Child A under oath on July 22, 2021.³

During that interview, Child A stated:

- a. Child A was in therapy with the Respondent for reunification with his half-sister, Child B.
- b. The Respondent wanted Child A and his parents to undergo psychological evaluations, “which were large sums of money,” and the Respondent told them they could only get these evaluations at the Facility where the Respondent worked.

³ By the time of the interview, Child A had reached 18 years of age.

- c. After the Respondent “could not convince any of [Child A’s] family to pay her . . . for these additional tests, she then filed unsupported allegations . . . against” Child A, Child A’s father, and Grandfather.
- c. The Respondent “became less and less of a therapist and more and more of a person trying to . . . extort something out of me.” The Respondent “really started fabricating stuff up.”
- d. The Respondent wrote a letter to the attorney for Child B’s mother in which the Respondent wrote private information about Child A, his father, and his grandfather. In the letter to the attorney, the Respondent “uses stuff that . . . she manipulated [Child A] to saying things that [Child A] wasn’t fully aware that she was going to use against [Child A] and [his] family.”

10. The Board’s investigator interviewed the Respondent under oath on July 27, 2021. During that interview, the Respondent stated:

- a. The Respondent was employed as a child and adolescent therapist at the Facility in Wicomico County, Maryland for five years.
- b. While the Respondent was employed at the Facility, the Father requested that the Respondent provide reunification services to his minor children, Child A and Child B.
- c. The Respondent began providing reunification services to the Father’s children. The Respondent stated that when she does a

reunification process, she tries to “involve as many of the family members as [she] can[.]”

- d. During the course of reunification, the Respondent interviewed the Grandfather on at least two occasions.
- e. The Respondent wanted the Father, the Grandfather, and Child A to undergo psychological evaluations in order to proceed with reunification.
- f. During the course of reunification, Child A and Child B told the Respondent information about the Grandfather that the Respondent then reported to CPS on May 11, 2018.
- g. During the course of reunification, the mother of Child B told the Respondent information about the Father and the Grandfather that the Respondent then reported to CPS on May 11, 2018.
- h. The Respondent does not know the results of the CPS investigation, but the Respondent “assume[s] nothing happened.”
- i. The Respondent authored and sent a letter to the attorney for the mother of Child B on or about May 14, 2018, which included information that the Respondent reported to CPS, as well as other information that the Respondent claims she learned while providing reunification services to Child A and Child B.

- j. The Respondent “didn’t ask permission” to write the letter to the mother’s attorney.

DISCUSSION

The Board finds that the Respondent is a mandatory reporter and that she did not violate the Social Work Practice Act in making reports to CPS. The Board finds that the Respondent committed an act of misconduct in the practice of social work and that she failed to comply with the maintenance of medical records as required under Title 4, Subtitles 3 and 4 of the Health—General Article when she wrote and sent a letter about the Father, Child A, and other family members to an attorney who represented an opposing party in an adversarial matter against the Father. In writing and sending this letter to the attorney, the Respondent shared confidences revealed by her clients without their consent, and the Respondent failed to ensure that confidential information would not be disseminated and failed to ensure that identities were protected. The attorney was able to use the letter from the Respondent to limit the legal rights of the Respondent’s clients. In light of the above, the Board finds that the Respondent violated provisions of the Maryland Social Workers Act and regulations governing the practice of social work adopted and published by the Board.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Board concludes as a matter of law that the Respondent violated Health Occ. § 19-311(4), (6) and (21) and COMAR 10.42.03.03(A)(5)(g), COMAR 10.42.03.03(B)(6) and COMAR 10.42.03.03(B)(7).

ORDER

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is this **1st** day of **December, 2022**, by a majority of the quorum of the Board considering this case hereby:

ORDERED that the Respondent's license to practice social work in the State of Maryland shall be **SUSPENDED** for a period of **TWO (2) MONTHS**, **retroactive to November 1, 2020**; and it is further

ORDERED that, upon renewal of the Respondent's license to practice social work in the State of Maryland, the Respondent's license to practice social work in the State of Maryland shall be placed on **PROBATION** for a minimum period of **ONE (1) YEAR** and until the following terms and conditions are fully and satisfactorily complied with:

- (a) Within one (1) year from the date the Board executes this Consent Order, the Respondent shall enroll in and successfully complete a Board-approved ethics tutorial and a Board-approved course in understanding and complying with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA"). Promptly after the completion of the tutorial and the course, the Respondent shall ensure that the instructor(s) provide the Board with written reports detailing the Respondent's participation in and completion of the tutorial and the course. The tutorial and the course shall be in addition to any course required to satisfy the continuing education requirements for the applicable 2-year licensure renewal period;
- (b) During the probationary period, the Respondent shall be supervised by a Board-approved supervisor ("Probation Supervisor"), subject to the following terms and conditions:
 - (i) Prior to the commencement of probation, the Respondent shall contact the Board to obtain a list of Board-approved supervisors and choose a Probation Supervisor from a list.

The Respondent shall provide the Probation Supervisor with a copy of this Consent Order prior to their initial meeting. The Board may release to the Probation Supervisor any portion of the investigative file as it deems necessary by the Board and/or the Probation Supervisor;

- (ii) The Respondent shall meet with the Probation Supervisor for a minimum of one (1) hour per month;
 - (iii) The Respondent shall fully comply with all Board guidelines relating to probation supervision as well as all recommendations from the Probation Supervisor;
 - (iv) The Respondent shall ensure that the Probation Supervisor provide the Board with written quarterly reports on the Respondent's progress during the supervision;
 - (v) At the conclusion of one (1) year of supervision, the Respondent may petition the Board, or a designated committee of the Board, for a termination of the supervision requirement. The Board or its designated committee may terminate the Respondent's supervision requirement if it deems such action appropriate and the Probation Supervisor recommends such action; and
 - (vi) A negative report from the Probation Supervisor or any failure to comply with the Probation Supervisor's recommendations shall be deemed a violation of probation or of this Consent Order.
- (c) The Respondent shall comply with the Maryland Social Workers Act and all laws, statutes, and regulations pertaining thereof; 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 five (5) years from the effective date of this Consent Order; 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 an evidentiary hearing if there is a genuine dispute as to the underlying facts, or an opportunity for a show cause hearing before the Board otherwise, may impose any sanction that the Board may have imposed in this case, including additional probationary terms and conditions, a reprimand, suspension, revocation and/or a monetary penalty; and it is further

ORDERED that at the conclusion of the **ONE (1) YEAR** probationary period, the Respondent may petition the Board for a termination of her probation. The Board may terminate the Respondent's probation depending on whether she has fulfilled all of the terms and conditions of the Consent Order, and whether there are any pending complaints against her; and it is further

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

ORDERED that for purposes of public disclosure, this Consent Order is considered a **PUBLIC DOCUMENT** pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Gen. Provisions, §§ 4-101 et seq. (2021 Repl. Vol.) and is reportable to any entity to whom the Board is obligated to report.⁴

⁴ This includes the Board's public website and NPDB.

Maria A. Hocker
License No. 11190
Consent Order



12/1/2022

Date

Sondra Petty, LCSW-C
Board Chair
Maryland State Board of Social Work
Examiners

CONSENT

I, **Maria A. Hocker, License No. 11190**, by affixing my signature hereto, acknowledge that:

1. I am represented by counsel and I have consulted with counsel on this matter. I have knowingly and voluntarily agreed to enter into this Consent Order. By this Consent and for the purpose of resolving the issues raised by the Board, I agree and accept to be bound by the foregoing Consent Order and its conditions.
2. I am aware that I am entitled to a formal evidentiary hearing, pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. § 19-312 (2021 Repl. Vol.) and Md. Code Ann., State Gov't, §§ 10-201 *et seq.* (2021 Repl. Vol.).
3. I acknowledge the validity and enforceability of this Consent Order as if entered into after the conclusions of a formal evidentiary hearing in which I would have the right to counsel, to confront witnesses, to give testimony, to call witnesses on my own behalf, and to all other substantive and procedural precautions as provided by law. I am waiving those procedural and substantive processes.
4. I voluntarily enter into and agree to abide by the terms and conditions set forth herein as a resolution of the Charges against me. I waive any right to contest the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and I waive my right to a full evidentiary hearing, as set forth above, and any right to appeal this Consent Order or any adverse ruling of the Board that might have followed any such hearing.
5. I acknowledge that any failure to abide by the conditions set forth in this Consent Order, I may be subject further disciplinary actions, including up to revocation of my license to practice as a social worker.
6. I sign this Consent Order voluntarily, without reservation, and I fully understand and comprehend the language, meaning, and terms of this Consent Order.

8-1-22
Date

Maria Hocker
Maria A. Hocker
Maria Hocker *pre dated*

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JOAN V. BARRETT
Notary Public
State of Delaware
My Commission Expires on October 6, 2023

Maria A. Hocker
License No. 11190
Consent Order

NOTARY

STATE OF Delaware

COUNTY OF Sussex

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on this 28 day of November 2022.

before me, a Notary Public of the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared **Maria A. Hocker**, License Number **11190**, 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.

Joan Barrett
Notary Public

