

Change Happens!

Sometimes change occurs quite suddenly. That's what the Board needs to do to better honor its primary mission of public protection as it relates to the complaint resolution process.

The complaint case load increased nearly 100% last year. In 2006 the Consumer Protection Committee (CPC) investigated and resolved **19 complaints** of alleged unethical conduct by licensees. CPC received **37 complaints in 2007**, 8 of which are still under review. Additionally, several of the 2007 complaints were quite complex. In one case, CPC reviewed **over 500 pages of information!** So far, 2008 looks even more challenging with 15 new complaints arriving in the Board office since the 1st of January. **We're heading for a record that no one wants!**

The 7 Board members are all volunteers. In 2006, the 3 CPC members spent an average of 4-5 hours preparing for a meeting. Currently they take approximately 15 hours to prepare for a meeting. Even with that dramatic increase they frequently don't feel fully ready to adequately discuss every case. Each month several cases are simply held over. In 2005, the median average length of time to resolve a complaint was **3.0 months**. In 2006 that rose to **3.5 months**. The average so far for the 2007 complaints is **4.0 months**. **That's a 33% increase over the last three fiscal years!** This increase of time to resolve complaints adds stress to the complainant as well as the licensee who is under investigation. It is imperative that complaints be investigated fairly, thoroughly, and **expeditiously**.

The Board's primary purpose is public protection. Neither complainants nor licensees are well served by a monthly review process conducted by overworked volunteers or by a prolonged complaint resolution process. The Board proposes to hire a full-time Compliance Specialist 2 to resolve this serious deficiency. This will be a totally new staff position for the Board and is an important change in the way the Board resolves complaints.

Funding. To increase the staff level as discussed above as well as cover some additional unexpected Board expenses will cost approximately \$143,000 for the remainder of this biennium (through June 30, 2009). The Board proposes meeting that budget increase by the following:

- Increase the annual LCSW Active License renewal fee by \$40. It is currently \$90/year and would go to \$130. (**Note: this does not affect the CSWA annual renewal fee or Inactive LCSWs**)
- Increase the Application fee from \$100 to \$150.
- Take approximately \$25,000 from the Board's ending balance.

Obviously, no one "wants" an increase in either application or annual LCSW renewal fees. However, the Board realizes that they need to fundamentally change the complaint resolution process. That need is so great that it is necessary to go through the process to add a staff position and change the budget in the middle of the biennium. The Board has initiated the Rulemaking Hearing Process to change the fees effective July 1, 2008. They will also go to the June E-Board meeting with a request for authorization to hire a full time Compliance Specialist 2.

Please submit your ideas about this proposed staff and fee increase in writing through any of the following:

- Mail: 3218 Pringle Road SE, Suite. 240, Salem, OR 97302
- Fax: 503-373-1427
- E-mail: Jon.Langewalter@state.or.us

Please submit your written comments by 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 2008. If you wish to present public testimony to the Board regarding this proposal, please attend the public hearing on the proposed rule changes which will be held at the Board office from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 2008. Feel free to contact the Board office if you have questions about this proposal or process.