STATE of OREGON
BOARD of LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS
Special Board Meeting
Friday, January 26, 2026
Via Microsoft Teams
3218 Pringle Road SE, Salem, OR 97302

Board Members Present: Amy Ashton-Williams, *LCSW, Board Chair*
Mollie Janssen, *LCSW, Vice Chair*
Paddy Farr, *LCSW*
Troy Costales, *Public Member*
Nicole Pantley, *Public Member*
Olivia Bormann, *CSWA*

Board Counsel Present: Kyle Martin, *AAG, Oregon Dept. of Justice*

Staff Members Present: Ray Miller, *Executive Director*
Kim Coleman, *Legislative and Licensing Analyst*
Mindy Tucker, *Sr. Compliance Specialist*
Noelle Johnson, *Licensing Compliance Specialist*

Public Present: Amy Baker, *Behavioral Health Initiative Director, Governor's Office*
April Roman, *Behavioral Health Advisor, Governor's Office*
Kenneth "KC" Ledell, *Senior Behavioral Health Advisor, Governor's Office*
Taylor Smiley Wolfe, *Deputy Chief of Staff Governor's Initiatives, Governor's Office*
Todd Younkin, *Executive Director, Mental Health Regulatory Agency (MHRA)*
Amanda Olsen, *Member of Public*
Amy Baird, *Member of Public*
Caroline Bleckmann, *Member of Public*
Cary Kelly, *Member of Public*
Cheryl Meyers, *Member of Public*
Bryan Wells, *Member of Public*
Della Hoffman, *Member of Public*
Dena Sites, Member of Public
Ellen Knox, *Member of Public*
Eugenia, *Member of Public*
Gabriel Benfield, *Member of Public*

Public Present (Continued):

Hang, *Member of the Public*
Heather Daugherty, *Member of Public*
Heather Volkman, *Member of Public*
Jennifer Sorenson, *Member of Public*
Jennifer Wells, *Member of Public*
Jessica Magnani, *Member of Public*
Josiah Erickson, *Member of Public*
Josh Lydon, *Member of Public*
Kathy Outland, *Member of Public*
Ka Rin Johnson, *Member of Public*
Kelsey Zettle, *Member of Public*
Kerri Stepisnik, *Member of Public*
Lacey, *Member of Public*
Leslie Langdon, *Member of Public*
Mari Montesano, *Member of Public*
Nathan Keep, *Member of Public*
Nikki, *Member of Public*
Rachael Bradbury, *Member of Public*
Rachel, *Member of Public*
Rachel Hadley, *Member of Public*
Raina Cole McRae, *Member of Public*
Randy Hart, *Member of Public*
Rene, *Member of Public*
Sean Gorda, *Member of Public*
Steffany Silsby, *Member of Public*
Taylor Gilbert, *Member of Public*
Travis Smith, *Member of Public*
Teresa Northy, *Member of Public*
Unnamed, *Member of Public*
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1. **CALL TO ORDER:**
   Chair Ashton-Williams called the Board Meeting to order at **9:03 AM.** Roll call taken as follows: Amy Ashton-Williams, LCSW Member, Board Chair: Present, Olivia Bormann, CSWA Member: Present, Paddy Farr, LCSW Member: Present, Nicole Pantley, Public Member: Present, Mollie Janssen, LCSW Member: Present, Troy Costales, Public Member: Present.

2. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

i. Board Chair Ashton-Williams motioned to move #3a Board Member Feedback to after #3c Proposed Legislative Concept and add January 7, 2026, Board Minutes as well as add Public Comment after Old Business.
ii. Bormann seconded the motion.
iii. Roll call taken as follows: Pantley: Aye, Bormann: Aye, Farr: Aye, Costales: Aye, Janssen: Aye, Ashton-Williams: Aye.
iv. Motion passed 6- 0, 0 abstention(s).

3. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

i. Vice Chair Janssen motioned to move January 7, 2026, Board Minute approval to the next Board meeting on February 20, 2026.
ii. Farr seconded the motion.
iii. Roll call taken as follows: Pantley: Aye, Bormann: Aye, Farr: Aye, Costales: Aye, Janssen: Aye, Ashton-Williams: Aye.
iv. Motion passed 6- 0, 0 abstention(s).

4. OLD BUSINESS:

Chair Ashton-Williams messaged the meeting chat, sharing that public comment will open towards the end of the meeting.

Governor's Office staff provided presentation of House Bill 4083. Governor's office staff shared the four concepts of House Bill 4083 as follows: 1) streamline payer credentialing for behavioral health workers, 2) reduce administrative burden to give workers more time to care for patients, 3) expand licensing boards' ability to serve licensees and protect consumers, and 4) implement cross-license supervision to expand access to clinical supervision.

The Governor's Office staff also provided background information about the Behavioral Health Talent Council (BHTC). The Governor's Office staff shared that the BHTC will be releasing a report on January 31, 2026, with a variety of recommended changes. The Governor's Office staff emphasized importance of collaboration with the Oregon BLSW to implement changes proposed by House Bill 4083.

Board members posed various questions about House Bill 4083. The Board stated that the Board did not receive communication about House Bill 4083. Board requested clarification about whether the Governor's Office is looking for feedback about House Bill 4083 or feedback about implementation of House Bill 4083. The Board asked if the Governor's Office and the BHTC conducted a workforce analysis to determine whether MHRA had the capacity to absorb the BLSW.

The Board shared concerns that the MHRA Executive Director's capacity and attention to the Oregon BLSW and other mental health boards will be lowered due to having to support three behavioral health boards.

The Board asked again what data, and information shows that Oregon BLSW's current structure is contributing to administrative burden, licensing backlogging, and workforce shortages. The Board also requested clarification about how MHRA Executive Director will have capacity to learn Oregon BLSW statutes and administrative rules, in addition to rules for other boards. The Board again asked where the Governor's Office received information that the current Board structure is contributing to a slow in social work licensure, workforce shortages or administrative burden.

The Board reiterated that there was no communication from the Governor's Office or the BHTC regarding House Bill 4083 or changes it could implement. The Board shared frustrations about communication of House Bill 4083. Executive Director Miller clarified that the Oregon BLSW did not receive funding from the General Fund.

The Board commented stating that the issues and challenges that have been presented were prior to Executive Director Miller being hired by the Board. The Board shared that ED Miller and staff have significantly addressed previous issues that the BLSW faced in sustainable ways to prevent issues from reoccurring. The Board shared that the lack of acknowledgement of the progress made by the Executive Director, staff and the BLSW feels disrespectful and intentional. The Board shared the current needs of the Oregon BLSW's staff and licensees, including a functioning licensing portal. The Board requested that sustainable fixes be implemented.

The Board thanked the Governor's Office for including the BLSW in the conversation now. And the Board also emphasized that true inclusion means being consulted early, having access to the same information as others, being able to raise concerns, and having those concerns addressed. The Board also stated that true inclusion means having a real voice in shaping a final decision and when those steps do not occur, people are not meaningfully included in the decision.

The Board requested that public member input from the chat be shown in the minutes of this meeting. The Board also asked if there is a way for any public member to receive an answer to their questions, either during the meeting or in another format.

The Board requested evidence that demonstrates that composite boards produce better outcomes and public protection. The Board also asked how it was determined that merging Oregon BLSW under MHRA would be a 0-cost line item and the Board also requested an explanation of that determination.

The Board expressed concerns that this intervention seems to be a downstream intervention. The Board stated that feedback being provided will be used for implementation.

Vice Chair Janssen stated that they will look forward to testifying against House Bill 4083 if it stays as written. Vice Chair Janssen encouraged members of the public to utilize their voice and reach out to representatives. Vice Chair Janssen requested clarification that feedback being offered is for implantation and not for adjusting wording of House Bill 4083. Chair Ashton-Williams encouraged members of the public to advocate for their profession just as they do for people.

The Governor's Office provided a response to the Board member's questions. Governor's Office staff stated that the hope is that feedback will be used for implementation. The Governor's Office staff shared that House Bill 4083, merges with the Oregon Board of Licensed Social Workers (BLSW), with the Mental Health Regulatory Agency (MHRA), to conserve administrative resources and reduce administrative burdens. The Governor's Office staff also shared that House Bill 4083 will implement cross licensure supervision. The Governor's Office staff asked the Board what their concerns are about both items.

The Governor's Office staff stated that House Bill 4083 looks to combine the BLSW administrative support under the MHRA administrative "umbrella." Governor's Office staff also stated that they have used monthly license processing and data reports that show that MHRA has been able to provide lots of improvements and support for both the psychologist and therapist and counselor boards. The Governor's Office staff shared that the hope and intention was that MHRA could also provide more efficiency for the social work board as well.

Governor's Office staff shared that House Bill 4083 would mean the Oregon BLSW has the same executive director as the Board of Psychology (BP) and the Board of Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists (BLPCT). The Governor's Office staff also stated that staff would provide additional support due to MHRA structure being overseen by one executive director, and teams of staff that support each Board and the required administrative duties.

The Governor's Office staff stated that the merging of BLSW with MHRA could make the functions of a smaller organization more effective through combination of resources and provide improved services to social workers through the reduction of barriers to licensure. The Governor's office staff also shared that that smaller organizations do not have staff that can focus on a specific area.

Governor's Office staff clarified that there is no implication that the Oregon BLSW is contributing to a slow in licensure, workforce shortages or administrative burden. The Governor's Office shared concerns about the Oregon BLSW administrative abilities which stem from monthly reports on license processing and monthly meetings with Executive

Directors. The Governor's Office staff also shared that the Governor's Office directed BLSW staff to prioritize processing new licensure applications. The Governor's Office shared that things such as complaints and investigations have been affected by that shift in priorities. Governor's Office staff shared that merging BLSW with MHRA was an administrative decision that the Governor though could bring more capacity to licensees.

The Governor's Office staff shared that members of the public can email Behavioral Health Initiative Director, Amy Baker, or reach out to their constituents for more information. The Governor's Office also shared that they meet once a month with Executive Director Miller and can review the questions members of the public have during those meetings as well.

The Governor's Office staff shared that they hear the Oregon BLSW concerns. Governor's Office staff expressed appreciation for opportunity to listen to feedback. The Governor's Office staff also shared that they would take feedback provided to add to discussion of House Bill 4083. Governor's Office staff also offered to come back for the next board meeting to continue the discussion.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT:

The Oregon BLSW received the following public comments via three methods: in-person testimony, live video and teleconference (via TEAMS) and virtual chat submissions.

Taylor Gilbert, Member of the Public, asked who would be responsible for sharing future updates with us about this bill and other bills.

Randy Hart, Member of the Public, shared experience with BLSW can be more responsive and get licensing and investigations completed faster than the counseling board. Hart expressed concerns about how House Bill 4083 will support such efficiencies. Hart also shared support of BLSW and work that they do to protect the public and uphold professional standards. Hart urged greater consideration of profession-specific impacts before moving forward.

Kelsey Zettle, Member of the Public, shared concerns about longer wait times for responses and licensing. Zettle shared that an email sent to the Oregon BLSW is responded to quickly and with helpful information. Zettle stated that if Board members and regulated social workers do not support merging BLSW and MHRA, that it will be considered moving forward with House Bill 4083.

Jennifer Wells, LCSW, shared that Oregon BLSW has significantly improved their processing times for applications as well as their response times. Wells also asked why merging BLSW with MHRA was the chosen solution instead of adding additional staff or modifying processes in place for efficiency. Wells also asked what the timeline looks like for the introduction of House Bill 4083.

Governor's Office staff responded to Jennifer Wells' question by sharing that the short legislative session is taking place over the month of February and that since the session has not begun, House Bill 4083 has not been posted. The Governor's staff shared that nothing has been scheduled yet and encouraged anyone interested to use the Oregon Legislative Information System (OLIS) to monitor for updates.

Kathy Outland, LCSW, shared concerns about Oregon BLSW being targeted under House Bill 4083 and asked if counseling and psychology had been considered

Nathan Keep, LCSW, shared concern about whether merging BLSW and MHRA will make BLSW more efficient. Keep also commented that BLSW may need more staffing to meet needs. Keep suggested a study to collect information about what barriers and inefficiencies are occurring prior to implementing changes. Keep emphasized that data and a clear analysis of what barriers are should drive changes before legislative concepts and house bills are introduced.

Kerri Stepisnik, CSWA, expressed gratitude to Oregon BLSW for standing up for social work and social workers. Stepisnik also shared that BLSW should not be merged with MHRA and asked what will happen to Board and administration if they are merged with MHRA. Stepisnik additionally asked about changing the process of LCSW testing.

Lacey, Member of the Public, shared concerns that House Bill 4083 has not taken current Board and social workers' thoughts and input into consideration. Lacey also asked if this bill will be pushed forward without the input from BLSW and regulated social workers, or will there be a pause to talk to those that House Bill 4083 will affect.

Robert Josh Lydon, LCSW, shared that the MHRA Executive Director is on the BHTC. Requested that the governor and the legislative body become more transparent and more engaging with the social work community to consider what the social work community needs.

Rene, Member of the Public, asked for documents from BLSW and other boards to compare and contract inefficiencies. Rene also asked to see what the Governor's Office tracks and to provide the opportunity to problem solve any issues before BLSW is merged with MHRA.

Raina Cole McRae, Member of the Public, asked if CSWA and LPC associates will change to have the same requirements if BLSW and MHRA merged. McRae also asked if the National Association of Social Workers is in support of House Bill 4083.

Teresa Northy, Member of the Public, stated that the OHA issue about CSWA has created the issue of patient access to counseling and support itself. Northy stated that insurance company policies and payment barriers are creating a barrier for clients to receive needed

care. Northy stated that merging BLSW and MHRA will exacerbate issues and Northy also shared that clients do not have easy access to health care and providers.

Kelly Cary, Member of the Public, stated they are strongly against losing the BLSW. Cary shared that other composite boards are harder to communicate with and receive answers from. Cary also shared that they cannot add clients to their caseload due to insurance credentialing barriers. Cary stated that all Care Oregon clients had to end services due to Care Oregon no longer covering the services that Cary offered. Cary shared that BLSW has been helpful in becoming licensed and providing supervision to licensees and BLSW has not been a barrier. Cary stated that merging BLSW and MHRA is the wrong solution for the wrong idea of the problem.

Rachel, Member of the Public, stated that the BLSW is not perfect, but that improvements have and continue to be made. Rachel shared concerns that licensees will become just a number.

Tyler St. Clair, Member of the Public, thanked BLSW and asked the Governor's Office to wait to pass House Bill 4083 until consulting and looking at data for what bill would do.

6. **ADJOURNMENT:**
Chair Ashton-Williams adjourned the Board meeting at **10:06 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Noelle Johnson, *Licensing Compliance Specialist*