

March 16, 2017

The Honorable Rudy Salas, Jr.
Chair, Assembly Committee on Business and Professions
State Capitol, Room 4016
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 89 (Levine) – Psychologists: suicide prevention training – SPONSOR

Dear Assembly Member Salas:

The Board of Psychology (Board) is pleased to **SPONSOR** AB 89 (Levine).

This bill would, effective January 1, 2020, require all licensees and applicants for licensure as a psychologist to have completed a minimum of six (6) hours of coursework, and/or applied experience under supervision in suicide risk assessment and intervention. This requirement could be met through coursework in a qualifying degree program, continuing education courses, or as part of supervised applied experience. For current licensees, this requirement could be fulfilled with new or past coursework, applied experience, or continuing education courses in suicide risk assessment and intervention.

Suicide is a critical public health issue in the State of California, where on average, one person dies of suicide every two hours and twice as many people die of suicide than by homicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) data shows that suicide is the third leading cause of death for Californians ages 15 to 34, and the tenth leading cause of death for Californians of all ages between the years of 2000-2015. Furthermore, CDC data also shows that the overall suicide rate in California has increased by 21.4 percent between the years 2000 through 2015.

After much consideration and deliberation, our Board feels it is time to take a leading role in this area and require suicide prevention training of our licensees. In response to the Governor's veto message of AB 2198 (Levine, 2014) relating to mandated one-time continuing education coursework in suicide prevention, the Board conducted surveys of doctoral programs and pre- and post-doctoral internship and practicum programs and reviews of licensure requirements for licensed psychologists in 2015 and 2016. The Board's surveys indicated significant variances in the amount of education and training being provided to psychologists and applicants, ranging from integrating pieces of the education and training across multiple courses (not quantifiable in hours), to dedicating time in courses or training programs ranging anywhere from 6 to 50 hours. Additionally, during the Board's review of licensure requirements and drafting of the suicide prevention training requirement language, the Board held multiple meetings where we received productive feedback from the public, suicide prevention advocates, persons affected by suicide, licensed psychologists and other mental health providers, and professional associations. The Board carefully weighed the data collected and the public input received during the review process, and determined that this issue required Board leadership and action. Although psychologists are among the best trained clinicians in mental health and expert in the rendering of psychological services, the variance in training received in graduate and training programs does not adequately ensure that consumers would be consistently assisted by all of our licensees. The Board decided to pursue a statutory requirement to establish a minimum number of hours of education or training in suicide risk assessment and intervention.

Competency in the assessment and treatment of suicidal patients is not a fixed quality, but rather requires ongoing education and training for licensees who may have received their training many

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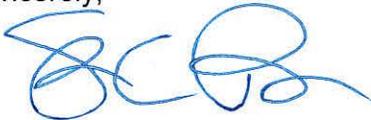
March 13, 2017

years ago. It is the Board's hope that by sponsoring AB 89 and highlighting the critical importance of suicide prevention training in the field of psychology, it will encourage licensees to periodically re-evaluate their level of competency in assessing and treating suicidal patients and further encourage licensees to seek additional training in suicide risk assessment and intervention. The Board also hopes that this bill will encourage graduate programs, internship programs, and post-doctoral training programs to evaluate the amount of training provided in these programs to ensure that their students and trainees complete the program feeling confident that they have the training they need to practice responsibly as psychologists.

AB 89 will not only help promote public health through improving the state's suicide prevention efforts, but also puts California in a leadership role with other states that protect consumers of psychological services through mandatory training in this critical area. AB 89 takes a critical first step in improving the state's suicide prevention efforts by meeting one of the goals of the 2008 "California Strategic Plan on Suicide Prevention: Every Californian is a Part of the Solution," which proposed developing and implementing guidelines to promote effective and consistent suicide prevention by incorporating suicide prevention training in existing licensing, credentialing, and graduate school programs. Furthermore, AB 89 puts California in line with six other states that require psychologists and licensed health care professionals to obtain a specified minimum number of hours of education or training in suicide risk assessment and intervention. By ensuring all psychologists meet a minimum level of education or training in suicide prevention, AB 89 enhances the state's suicide prevention efforts and protects consumers of psychological services who rely on psychologists having the basic education and training required to identify and aid a patient with suicidal ideation in finding competent treatment.

For these reasons, the Board asks for your support of AB 89 when it is heard in the Assembly Committee on Business and Professions. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Board's Executive Officer, Antonette Sorrick, at (916) 574-7113. Thank you.

Sincerely,



STEPHEN C. PHILLIPS, JD, PsyD
President, Board of Psychology

cc: Members of the Assembly Committee on Business and Professions
Assembly Member Marc Levine
Le Ondra Clark Harvey, PhD, Chief Consultant, Assembly Committee on Business and Professions
Bill Lewis, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus