

**BEFORE THE MISSISSIPPI STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS FOR  
LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS**

**In the Matter of:**

**STACI STAPLETON,**

**Respondent**

**No. 2023-30**

**FINAL ORDER**

THIS MATTER came before the Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors (“Board”) on October 4, 2023, pursuant to a Notice to Show Cause issued to Staci Stapleton (“Applicant”). Board Member Melissa H. Windham, Ph.D., LPC-S, NCC, NCSC, recused herself and did not participate in the Board’s consideration and deliberation in this matter. A quorum of the remaining Board members was present throughout the hearing and deliberation in the matter.

Alexis Morris, legal counsel for the Board, presented the case regarding the denial of licensure to the Board. The Applicant, having been served with notice of these proceedings and being fully informed of her rights to a formal hearing before the Board, elected to proceed in the matter and to represent herself. The case was called for hearing without objection from any party.

Royce M. Cole served as Administrative Hearing Officer, presided at the hearing, and was directed to prepare the Board’s written decision in accordance with its deliberation. Having conducted the hearing in this matter, and based upon the exhibits, testimony and the evidence presented, the Board makes the following findings, conclusions and order based on clear and convincing evidence:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. The Board is established pursuant to Title 73, Chapter 30 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, as amended, and is charged with the duty of licensing and regulating the practice of Licensed Professional Counselors in the State of Mississippi.

2. On or about August 18, 2023, the Board received an application for provisional-licensed professional counselor (P-LPC).

3. On or about September 29, 2023, the Board denied the application for P-LPC based on the information presented by the Applicant and based on the Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors Rules and Regulations (“Board’s Rules and Regulations”).

4. The Board found that the Applicant lacked the qualifying degree for licensure.

Specifically, the Board found that the Applicant's forensic psychology degree did not qualify. Several three-semester hour courses required under Rule 4.2(B) of the Board's Rules and Regulations were also missing. Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations; Introduction to Professional Counseling/Ethics, Internship, Testing and Appraisal; and Counseling Skills were listed in the denial letter to the Applicant. The Board further found that the application was missing contact information for back up LPC-S regarding secure means for distance supervision and clarification on whether the SimplePractice platform would be utilized for such supervision.

5. The Board also listed information that was either missing from the Declaration of Practice or information that lacked detail. The missing information included an address of the practice setting, whether the format would be in person or virtual and the use and limits of distance meetings, the client emergency contact, whether sessions would be recorded by audio or video, and the signature and date lines for the P-LPC and the client. The Applicant did not provide enough detail regarding the confidentiality statement, court ordered records, privilege communication, the client responsibility, and the potential risks of counseling.

6. On August 2, 2023 the Board received the Applicant's request for a show cause hearing before the Board to present evidence and testimony as to why her application for P-LPC licensure should not be denied.

7. In accordance with Miss. Code. Ann. §73-30-11, on August 21, 2023, the Board issued a Notice to Show Cause to the Applicant to provide her with an opportunity to show cause why her application should not be denied. The Notice to Show Cause advised the Applicant of the time, place, and nature of the hearing to be held before the Board.

8. Miss. Code. Ann. §73-30-9(1)(f) lists the eligibility requirements for P-LPC licensure. The list includes, among other things, proof the applicant has "a minimum acceptable graduate semester hour or acceptable quarter-hour master's degree . . . primarily in counseling or related counseling field from a regionally or nationally accredited college or university program in counselor education or a related counseling program" as required by the Board. According to 4.2(B)(1) of the Board's Rules and Regulations, the minimum acceptable hours are (60) sixty semester or (90) ninety quarter hours of graduate study. The rule further states that "[f]or degrees conferred after January 1, 2017, the Board will only accept (60) sixty hours or ninety (90) quarter-hour master's degree programs." The program must be either CACREP degree programs or programs with the word counseling in the title and meet the CACREP structure. The Applicant's degree did not satisfy the requirements.

9. The Applicant appeared before the Board in support of her application for P-LPC licensure. She submitted that she met the education requirements based on 73-30-9(10)(f) referenced above. The Applicant received a Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology from the Chicago School of Forensic Psychology August 1, 2010. This degree is not a qualifying degree as it is not a CACREP degree program, or a program containing the word counseling in the title and does not meet the CACREP structure. The Applicant argued, however, that her Forensic Psychology degree is a qualifying degree. She did so by admitting into evidence copies of class titles, numbers, and descriptions from an archived catalog of the Chicago School of Forensic

Psychology for the academic school year 2010-2011 and from a summer addendum for 2022-2023 as well as an unofficial copy of her transcript, a Declaration of Practices of Mississippi P-LPC, a Professional Disclosure and Counseling Supervision Contract. According to the Applicant, this evidence proved that she had taken the required courses the Board determined in the denial letter were missing from her application. In comparing the two sets of class titles and descriptions, the Applicant testified that class titles and descriptions from the summer addendum for 2022-2023 were essentially the same classes she took in 2010-2011, only renamed. She even handwrote the titles from 2022-2023 that she believed corresponded with the archived classes from 2010-2011. The class titles and descriptions she highlighted from 2022-2023 were matches to the classes missing from her application. The Applicant also testified that although her degree is in forensic psychology, she believed that the program provided her with tools to counsel in other settings not just forensics.

10. The evidence of record reflects that the Applicant's degree from the Chicago School of Forensic Psychology is not a qualifying degree because it is not intended for licensure or certification. Further, the Applicant's unofficial transcript, which was admitted at the hearing, from her education institute does not show evidence of the above degree course work described in Rule 4.2 of the Board's Rules and Regulations during her tenure.

Based upon the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Board makes the following:

### **CONCLUSION OF LAW**

1. The Board has jurisdiction of this matter pursuant to Sections 73-30-7 and 73-30-11. Venue is likewise properly placed before the Board to hear this matter in Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi.

2. This matter was duly and properly convened and all substantive and procedural requirements under law have been satisfied.

3. Section 73-30-7 authorizes the Board to adopt such rules and regulations as it finds necessary to conduct the business of the Board and to carry out its licensure and regulatory functions.

4. Section 73-30-9 provides that an applicant must furnish the Board with satisfactory evidence he or she meets the requirements for licensure.

5. The Applicant has not fulfilled the required educational requirements necessary for licensure as a P-LPC.

6. By clear and convincing evidence, the Board finds that Applicant has failed to demonstrate that she meets the education requirements necessary for a P-LPC license established by Section 73-30-9(1)(f) and Rule 4.2(B) of the Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors Rules and Regulations.

Given the entire evidence produced in the record, the Board issues the following order:

**ORDER**

**IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that the denial of licensure for P-LPC for Staci Stapleton is affirmed by clear and convincing evidence in accordance with Section 73-30-9(1)(f) and Rule 4.2(B) of the Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors Rules and Regulations.

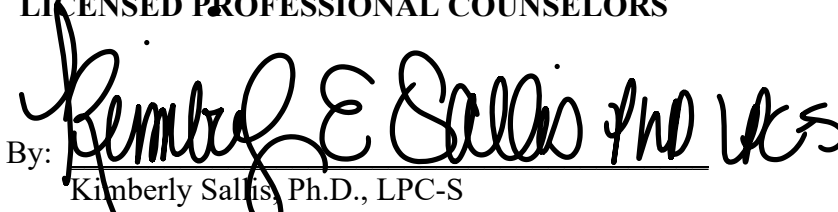
**IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that this decision and opinion shall be a final order of the Board and shall be conclusive evidence of the matters described herein.

**IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that this action of the Board shall be public record. It may be shared with other licensing boards (in-and out-of-state) and the public may be reported to the appropriate entities as required or authorized by state and/or federal law or guidelines. This action shall be spread upon the Minutes of the Board as its official act and deed.

**FURTHER ORDERED** that upon execution of this Final Order by affixing the Board authorized signature below, the provision of this Final Order shall become the final order of the Board.

**SO ORDERED**, this the 13th day of December, 2023.

**MISSISSIPPI STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS FOR  
LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS**

By:   
Kimberly Sallis, Ph.D., LPC-S  
Chair for and on behalf of the Board