

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

**In the Matter of:**

**STEVEN ROLLINS STAFFORD,**

**Respondent**

**No. 2022-28**

**FINAL ORDER**

THIS MATTER came before the Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors (“Board”) on June 26, 2023 and June 27, 2023, to determine whether the Respondent, Steven Rollins Stafford (“Respondent”) failed to properly assist with the continuity of care of his patients due to lack of documentation, failed to communicate regarding the transferring of patients, failed to write progress notes or forms of initial evaluations and assessments for multiple clients, alleged negligence occurred over a two-year period involving multiple clients. A quorum of Board members was present throughout the hearing and deliberation in the matter. The Board hired an outside investigator and no one recused.

Alexis Morris, Legal Counsel for the Board, presented the charges regarding the failure to properly assist with continuity of care due to lack of documentation, the failure to communicate regarding the transferring of patients, the failure to write progress notes or forms of initial evaluations and assessments for multiple clients, and whether the alleged negligence occurred over a two-year period involving multiple clients. Respondent, having been served with notice of these proceedings and being fully informed of his rights to a formal hearing before the Board, appeared in person for the hearing and was represented by legal counsel, Wade G. Manor. 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. Respondent began employment as an LPC-S at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (“UMMC”) in January 2019 and continued there until April 28, 2022. On or about July 20, 2022, Savanna Norfleet (“Norfleet”), an LPC employed at UMMC in the Pediatrics Inpatient Psychology Division, filed a complaint with the Board against Respondent for lack of

documentation. Several of Respondent's previous patients had been transferred to Norfleet. Norfleet noted in the complaint that Respondent had not written progress notes or completed any form of in-take or initial evaluation and assessments. She further noted that there was an almost complete lack of documentation in most of the patient charts and that there had been no appropriate continuity of care due to lack of documentation or communication regarding patient transfers in violation of the American Counseling Association ("ACA") Code of Ethics and institutional policies. She reported that this alleged pattern of negligence spanned over two years. Norfleet testified that she had a professional relationship with Respondent and thought it was her duty to report.

3. Upon the Board's receipt of the complaint, an outside investigator, Leona Bishop (Bishop) was hired by the Board to investigate. Bishop testified that LeeAnn Mordecai, Executive Director for the Board, contacted her and asked her to investigate the complaint filed by Norfleet. The evidence of record established that Bishop has been an LPC for 28 years and has a private counseling practice. Bishop is also familiar with the Rules and Regulations of the Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors ("Board's Rules and Regulations") as she previously served as a Board member from 2007 to 2012.
4. Bishop notified Respondent by letter dated October 5, 2022 that Norfleet had filed a complaint against him on or about July 20, 2022. She also informed Respondent that the complaint was under investigation in accordance with the Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors Rules and Regulations ("Board's Rules and Regulations") and that the Board had not initiated any formal disciplinary action against him. The allegations Bishop listed in the complaint included failure to appropriately assist with the continuity of care due to lack of communication and documentation of services rendered to clients including, but not limited to, intake, initial assessments or evaluations, and progress notes. Bishop listed six ACA Code of Ethics violations implicated by the allegations: (1) A.1.b. - (Records and Documentation; (2) A.2.a. - (Informed Consent in the Counseling Relationship); (3) A.11.d - (Appropriate Transfer of Services; (4) A.12. - (Abandonment and Client Neglect); (5) B.6.h. - (Storage and Disposal After Termination; and (6) C.1. - (Knowledge and Compliance with Standards. Respondent was instructed to submit a response within 10 days of receiving the letter in accordance with the Board's Rules and Regulations.
5. On October 14, 2022, Respondent submitted a written response to the allegations in the complaint. Respondent acknowledged making chart mistakes and getting reminders to make corrections but denied having failed to document appointments over a two year period as such a lapse would have been caught during UMMC's routine audits and disciplinary action would have ensued; denied ever being disciplined for documentation failures; denied violating informed consent; denied abandoning clients; claimed he was not allowed to continue work and was locked out of his computer the same day he submitted a two-week resignation letter; and was never asked to assist in the transition of his caseload after he offered to assist.
6. After completing her investigation, Bishop recommended to the Board to proceed with an Administrative Hearing based on the information she received from witness and Respondent interviews, review of Norfleet's complaint, and the Board's Rules and Regulations. On December 9, 2022, the Board sent Respondent by certified mail a Notice of Hearing and

Complaint to be held before the Board on January 20, 2023. Upon request from Morris and Wade, the Board rescheduled the hearing for March 10, 2023, by sending by certified mail an Amended Notice of Hearing and Complaint dated February 6, 2023. The Board sent its final Amended Notice of Hearing and Complaint by certified mail dated May 30, 2023 rescheduling the hearing, at Respondent's request, for June 26 and 27, 2023.

7. At the hearing, Norfleet testified that she could not discern whether Respondent had a session with a patient because there were no notes. She further testified that information important for continuity of care such as diagnosis, time in and out, and goals were absent from the notes on three former patients she inherited from Respondent.
8. Bishop acknowledged during cross-examination that the Notice of Hearing and Complaint and subsequent Amended Notices of Hearing and Complaint listed potential violation as ACA Code of Ethics Rule A.1.a. - (Primary Responsibility) rather than ACA Code of Ethics Rule A.1.b. - (Records and Documentation) as she noted in her October 5, 2022 letter to Respondent. The evidence of record establishes that Respondent was aware that his conduct potentially violated ACA Code of Ethics Rule A.1.b. - (Records and Documentation). In his October 14, 2022 response to Bishop's letter, Respondent specifically listed and addressed violations of ACA Code of Ethics Rule A.1.b. - (Records and Documentation). Bishop also acknowledged that violation of ACA Code of Ethics Rule A.2.a. - (Informed Consent in the Counseling Relationship) was not included in the UMMC records and was not an issue noted by Norfleet in her complaint.
9. Stacy Baldwin ("Baldwin"), Chief Integrity Officer at UMMC, testified that at the time of the hearing she had been serving in this capacity in the Office of Integrity and Compliance for nearly a year. Baldwin testified that the Office of Integrity and Compliance is charged with carrying out the compliance program at UMMC. Various teams within the Office of Integrity and Compliance division consistently monitor and audit records for billing compliance.
10. Baldwin testified that in April 2022, her office received a call from Dr. Elkin, Respondent's supervisor, identifying some billing records for which Respondent had provided no supporting documentation. Baldwin said that a hold was placed on Respondent's billing, as is customary, to ensure that no billing was sent out for payment and to conduct a thorough investigation.
11. Baldwin pulled audit samples of three years (2020, 2021, and 2022) of Respondent's billing records from EPIC, the electronic billing, and health record system utilized by UMMC for over twenty years. She testified that random sampling of Respondent's billing from 2020 and 2021 did not yield areas of concern. However, the sampling from January through April of 2022 yielded 185 claims submitted for payment during that period. Baldwin said that those claims should have contained supporting documentation for each patient's visit. Of the 185 claims, 84 included the diagnosis but contained no documentation to support the visit. Baldwin further explained that the 84 claims included no documentation in the template boxes labeled for target symptoms, mood, affect, mental status, or sleep quality. Because of the lack of documentation, all the payers had to be identified and refunded.

12. According to Baldwin, many of the providers created their own templates as she believed the Respondent had done. When asked whether incomplete billing templates could be submitted for payment, Baldwin said that they could. For example, once a provider documents the visit, signs off on the visit, and enters the appropriate code, then the documents are submitted for billing, which is what Baldwin testified had occurred with Respondent. Essentially, Baldwin established that Respondent's claims were submitted without proper documentation and sent out for payment to various payers such as Medicaid, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Aetna, or a self-paying patient.
13. Baldwin compiled a report of her findings and determined the amounts to be reimburse to the payers. She testified that UMMC had to submit a letter to Medicaid identifying the billing issue and explaining what happened - including a spreadsheet with the letter. When asked, Baldwin said that UMMC owed Medicaid less than \$10,000 but had not calculated the total reimbursement issued to other payers. Baldwin testified that when simple errors are found or when there is a misunderstanding about what must be documented, extensive education is provided, and a re-audit is conducted. However, in Respondent's case, she said that the 84 cases with a lack of documentation were devastating to the case. Baldwin said that Respondent's lack of documentation did not constitute mistakes, were not accidental, or a "one off" with an intent to go back and amend.
14. After completing the investigation, Baldwin and Tiffany Bates, Director of Health Systems Compliance at UMMC, met with Respondent for a recorded interview. The recording was played for the Board. In the recording, Respondent admitted to failing to document his billing records and said that he had no excuse for doing so. Baldwin told Respondent that his actions made UMMC look bad and cost the institution money. He said that he had over committed himself to various activities and was having problems at home. He said that he would rather resign in lieu of termination and asked to go back and fix the documentation issues for records from January through April 2022. His case file was sent to human resources, and he was not allowed back into the system as his access to EPIC was terminated. Respondent was allowed to resign the same day.
15. By his own admission, Respondent failed to provide required documentation for patient billing records at UMMC. Additionally, he admitted disliking and being terrible at documentation. The evidence received shows that Respondent failed to properly assist with the continuity of care of his patients due to lack of documentation, failed to communicate regarding the transferring of patients, and failed to write progress notes or forms of initial evaluations and assessments for multiple clients.

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

### **CONCLUSIONS 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 73-30-21 authorizes the Board to revoke, suspend, assess a civil penalty (fine), place a license holder on probation, refuse to renew a license and/or take other appropriate action with respect to any license for a violation of the laws, rules, and regulations governing licensed professional counselors.

5. The Board finds by clear and convincing evidence, the Respondent violated the following American Counseling Association Code of Ethics Codes: Rule A.1.b. - (Records and Documentation); Rule A.11.d. - (Appropriate Transfer of Services); Rule B.6.a. - (Creating and Maintaining Records); and Rule C.1. - (Knowledge of and Compliance with Standards). The Board further finds Respondent violated Rule 3.2.J.2. - (Engaging in the conduct of professional counseling in a grossly negligent or incompetent manner) of the Board's Rules and Regulations. Given the entire evidence produced in the record, the Board issues the following order:

### **ORDER**

**IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that Respondent shall be suspended for a minimum of six (6) months from the date the Board's Order is signed by the Board.

**FURTHER ORDERED** that once the six (6) months suspension is completed, Respondent may request, in writing, that the Board issue him a Restricted Status LPC. The restricted status shall require the Respondent to practice counseling under supervision for a minimum of twelve (12) months. At the time of the request, the Licensee shall submit a Request Letter, Declaration of Practice, and signed Supervision Agreement to the Board. The terms of the supervision shall follow the guidelines set forth in Rule 4.3(b). The LPC-S shall be approved by the investigator or her Board approved designee. Once supervision is completed successfully, the LPC-S shall submit a Supervision Form B documenting the experience with recommendation regarding licensure.

**FURTHER ORDERED** that Respondent must maintain his LPC as pursuant to the rules and regulations of the Board.

**FURTHER ORDERED** that Respondent shall take twenty-four (24) Continuing

Education Hours (CEH) in professional ethics, which shall include documentation and treatment planning, as approved in advanced by the Board investigator or her Board approved designee. These CEHs are in addition to the LPC renewal requirements. All CEH requirements must be NBCC approved and at least twelve (12) CEHs must be attended in person onsite. These continuing education requirements are not included as part of the licensing renewal process.

**FURTHER ORDERED** that Respondent shall be assessed the cost of the Board investigation and hearing costs.

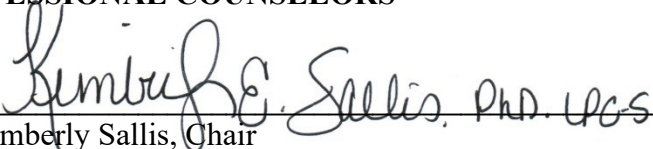
**FURTHER ORDERED** that once Respondent completes all the terms of this Board's Order, he may request the Board to remove the restrictions and return him to active status as an LPC.

**FURTHER ORDERED** that Respondent has thirty-six (36) months from the beginning of this Board's Order to complete the terms and conditions herein.

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

**SO ORDERED**, this the 25th day of September 2023.

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

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Kimberly Sallis, Chair