

After 47 Years of LSBEP

# Senator Mount Files Bill To Dissolve Psychology Board

On April 15th Senator Willie Mount of Lake Charles filed a bill to consolidate the Louisiana State Board of Examiners of Psychologists and the Licensed Professional Counselors Board of Examiners. The proposed legislation is Senate Bill 226. If passed, the legislation will consolidate the two boards into the "Louisiana Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board."

The bill dissolves both of the current boards, noting in Section 13 of the bill, "The State Board of Examiners of Psychologists and the Louisiana Licenses Professional Counselors

Board of Examiners are hereby terminated."

Senator Mount's bill deletes the psychology board (see strikethrough) from existing law. In "§2351. Declaration of purpose," the text notes, "It is hereby declared that ~~the creation of a State Board of Examiners of Psychologists~~ it is necessary to regulate the practice of psychology in order to safeguard life, health, property and the public welfare of this state, and in order to protect the people of this state against unauthorized, unqualified, and improper application of psychology. The bold and underlined sections are the Senator's additions.

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The current LSBEP. Senator Mount's bill could terminate the board, ending 47 years of the psychology board's existence in the state. The proposed legislation places psychology with counseling under a new board.

## Psychology Board Established 1964

The LSBEP was established in 1964. "I was an undergraduate and I was scurrying around helping psychologists push it through," said Dr. Tom Hannie regarding the bill that created our board 47 years ago. The LSBEP was established by the hard work of the state association, APA, and those in the psychology community.

The process included a number of negotiations with medicine in order to establish the independent regulation of psychology. In order for the bill to succeed initially, a compromise with organized medicine had been made: a clause

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## Committee Vote Could Come as Early as Monday

Senator Mount's bill is currently assigned to the Senate Commerce Committee, although sources suggest that she may change it to be heard in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee.

The legislative session convenes Monday, (April 25<sup>th</sup>) and committees can begin hearing bills at that time.

# Editorial Page

## Another Blow to the Uniqueness of Psychologists

Just as we might be picking ourselves up and dusting ourselves off from 251, here comes SB 226.

Act 251 placed the practice of psychology (by medical psychologists) under medicine, finally answering the reoccurring question of “What’s the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist?” –Maybe not all that much anymore.

The new bill by Senator Mount seems to acknowledge no difference between psychologists and counselors. Why not place psychologists together with counselors, since they are interchangeable parts? And throw in one-third consumers who have to swear on a bible that they have no connection to the topic about which they must make decisions.

But what is also of a concern is the invisibility of the unique characteristics of our profession. Our rigorous and different training sets us apart in fundamental ways that are often difficult to describe to the public. How many under this board will know how and why to use a quasi-experimental design for helping a youngster with learning problems, conduct a study of clients’ outcomes, understand the statistics in the journals we review, back up testimony with carefully selected scientific evidence. --Just a few examples of our differences.

Psychologists, psychology faculty members, and psychology graduate students, should all be watching this next blow to our unique identity very carefully. It might be a good idea to contact your legislator soon.

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### LSBEP in 1964, Con't from pg 1...

requiring consultation and collaboration with the patient’s physician.

Dr. Tom Stigall recalled the process. “I remember it went something like this,” he said. “If a psychologist engaged in psychotherapy they were required to consult and collaborate with a licensed medical doctor concerning the patient’s general health.” He continued, “The law presented two problems, access and reimbursement.” While seemingly a small matter, the clause limited access by the public to services of licensed psychologists, and insurance companies often used the clause to deny reimbursement.

The situation helped unite Louisiana psychologists who felt passionate about psychology’s relatively young legal and professional identity. Dr. Stigall said, “Psychologists were not licensed to do any kind of medical procedures or to practice medicine, so to have a disclaimer in the law that said you couldn’t do what was clearly a psychological procedure without ‘consulting and collaborating’ with a physician, it seemed inappropriate.”

“It was a long hard struggle,” he said. But eventually, after numerous attempts over many years, and the efforts of countless people, the clause was eliminated in the late 1970s. “That was probably one of the most significant legislative achievements during that time.”

## Dissolve Psychology Bd...

The bill can be found on the Senate page under prefiled bills for the 2011 regular session at <http://senate.legis.state.la.us/sessioninfo/2011/rs/Default.htm>

The legislation is strongly opposed by both psychologists and counselors. President-Elect of the Louisiana Psychological Association, Dr. Phil Griffin, noted to the *Times* that "...our association is opposed to the bill and will work to see it defeated." Grassroots of Psychology in Louisiana is also strongly opposed to the legislation and is working to oppose the bill and look at alternatives, according to several sources. Based on communication on their website, The Louisiana Counseling Association is also opposing this bill, noting several problems in the bill.

The text of SB 226 dissolves both boards and establishes a nine-member board composed of three psychologists (or medical psychologists) and three counselors. One of the three counselors is to be a Marriage and Family Counselor.

The bill decreases the number of board members from five to three in psychology. The counselors' board, currently with 10 professional and one public member, will be reduced to three.

The remaining three members, one-third of the board, are to come from the public. The text notes, "Three members who shall represent the general public and who are not, and have never been, licensed in a mental health related profession and who are in no way connected with the practice of any such profession regulated by the board."

The new composition seems to place the current technical workload of 15 volunteer and non-compensated professionals, on six professionals. It is unclear what the role of the public members is intended to be.

The text of the bill does not seem to mention the APA code of ethics. However, the text appears to indicate that the board will adopt the code of ethics of the American Counseling Association.

Senator Mount's bill also appears to create an advisory committee established for Marriage and Family Counselors. There do not seem to be any other advisory committees mentioned for various specialties in psychology.

This bill follows the failure of the "Behavioral Health Professionals Working Group" to reach a consensus solution on language for the counselors that would clarify the issue of diagnosing mental illness. This Working Group was created by a resolution from Senator Mount in 2010 that instructed the two boards to work toward a resolution over scope of practice. The minutes and final report from their meetings indicated some progress in mutual understanding, but also noted continued issues between the two boards.

At the recent LPA convention, Dr. Joe Comaty spoke for the Louisiana State Board of Examiners of Psychologists saying that a letter had been sent to the Senator opposing the bill. And, he said that he felt that Senator Mount's letter contained inaccuracies and was "biased against" psychology. He declined to clarify exactly what he considered these "inaccuracies" to entail.

Based on a letter distributed to both psychologists and counselors, Senator Mount's reason for her legislation is to cause the two groups to work together.

In her letter, published last month in the *Times*, she wrote, "With the history of senseless conflict and fighting and the failure of the professions to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the working group, I am left with no other options other than to introduce legislation to consolidate these boards."

And, "I have made it abundantly clear to both boards and the respective professional associations that I am open to any alternative solution which BOTH professions can agree upon. So far, both sides have indicated that they are against the proposed consolidation, but neither side has been able to propose an alternative solution."

## Psychologists Discussing Issues

Psychologists and interested members of the community may contact individuals below to discuss their concerns or views regarding SB 226.

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### Other news

#### **Dr. Peter Hess To Speak Tuesday**

Dr. Peter Hess from the Nation Center for Science will speak on "Thinking Beyond Polemics: Science, Evolution, and Religious Belief in a Pluralistic Society." The talk is organized by Dr. Tom Hannie and will take place Tuesday, April 26, at 7:00 pm at the Unitarian Church in Baton Rouge.