

Misuse of Professional Titles When a License is Inactive or Suspended

By Laura Hinds MSW, LSW

As a board, we are charged with supporting the ethical and professional practice of our respective fields of practice. A significant piece of this responsibility is acquiring continuing education credits. All professionals should be aware of the significant repercussions for fraudulent reports of completed credits that are discovered through the audit process. For those whose license has been suspended or been inactivated, there are appropriate steps to prevent further disciplinary actions.

It is important to note that representing oneself as a Licensed Social Worker (LSW), Licensed Marriage or Family Therapist (LMFT) or Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) during a period of suspension or inactivity is a violation of state regulations. As the board has been encountering more and more cases where people have held themselves out inappropriately as licensed professionals, we thought it pertinent to review this point.

If you are entering a period of inactivity of your license or suspension, take care not to use professional titles or their abbreviations in:

- Letterheads,
- Business cards,
- Staff directories
- Voicemail, signage, or Web site,
- Your signature on case notes, letters, or any professional communication.

Use of professional titles or designations during suspension or periods of inactivity is a violation of the regulations and risks disciplinary action! Please take steps to be accountable while managing a period of inactive licensure or suspension.

Act 25 to Strengthen Consumer Protection

On July 17 **Governor Edward G. Rendell** signed Act 25 into law, which is a major legislative accomplishment for the Bureau for Professional and Occupational Affairs and

its boards. This law raises the maximum fine the board imposes for violations of the licensing laws or regulations from \$1,000 to \$10,000, as well as authorizing the licensing boards to impose the costs of investigation. Furthermore, the act provides privilege protection to Department of State investigative files, as well as confidentiality requirements.

“This is an important law because the new maximum fine acts as a very strong deterrent to unlawful activity by licensees, which in turn will enable us to more effectively protect the health, safety and welfare of every consumer in the commonwealth,” **Commissioner Basil L. Merenda** said.

Act 25 will affect all 29 boards supported by BPOA, and it goes into effect 60 days after enactment. At that time, prosecutors will be able to recommend to the respective licensing board the maximum fine if the violation is egregious.

Mobilizing board members to reach across party lines to contact senators and representatives was also key in the enactment of this bill. The board members explained, from their viewpoint, why this legislation needed to be passed to effectively carry out Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs' and each board's mission.

Future plans for legislation include proposals to create a statutory obligation for a licensee to cooperate with investigators and prosecutors in disciplinary matters and authorizing the boards' authority to expunge a disciplinary history of a license for minor violations such as failure to complete the continuing education requirement.

Other News:

[Disciplinary Actions](#)

[Governor's Newsletter](#)

[Sign up now](#) to receive the weekly e-newsletter from Governor Rendell on important issues facing Pennsylvania.