

BEFORE THE WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS

IN THE MATTER OF:

JENNIFER SAUNDERS
Licensed Social Worker
License Number: AP00941415

Case No. 0103-0312

CONSENT AGREEMENT

Comes now Jennifer Saunders, LSW, and the West Virginia Board of Social Work Examiners (hereinafter the "Board"), by counsel, Doren Burrell, Assistant Attorney General, for the purpose of agreeing to disciplinary action which shall be taken against Ms. Saunders by the Board pursuant to W.V. Code § 30-30-7(a)(6). As reflected in this document, the parties have reached an agreement concerning the proper disposition of this matter, and the Board approving such agreement, does hereby find and **ORDER** as follows:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Board is a state entity created by WV Code § 30-30-1 et seq., and is empowered to regulate the practice of social work pursuant to WV Code § 30-30.
2. Ms. Saunders was hired as a licensed social worker on January 13, 2003 with Southern Highlands Community Mental Health Center to provide services to male clients in the Legends Addiction Treatment Center.

3. That on January 20, 2003 at approximately 1:00 a.m. Ms. Saunders was discovered in a compromising situation in the bedroom of a male client. Upon forced entry by a co-worker she was discovered on the floor near the bed and was told to vacate the facility by the co-worker who was in charge of activity at the facility at that time. Ms. Saunders did not indicate to her co-worker that she was in need of assistance nor had she been threatened in any manner.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. WV Code § 30-30-7(a) states that “[t]he board may refuse to issue or renew a license, or may suspend or revoke an existing license....[if a social worker] [h]as been found guilty by the board of unprofessional conduct in accordance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the board.

2. The Board has adopted the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics as the Code of Ethics for West Virginia social workers, 25 C.S.R. 1-2.4 and 4.1.

3. The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics specific standards in this matter states as follows:

1.06 (A): Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment. Social workers should inform clients when a real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary and protects clients' interest to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, protecting the clients' interests may require termination of the professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

1.06(C): Social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should take steps to protect clients and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

1.10: Physical Contact-Social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as cradling or caressing clients). Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern such physical contact.

4. As indicated in the Findings of Fact, Ms. Saunders, a licensed social worker, violated these sections of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics when she engaged in the acts set forth in the Findings of Fact.

CONSENT

Jennifer Saunders, by affixing her signature hereon, agrees to the following:

1. She acknowledges that she is aware of her option to pursue this matter through appropriate administrative and/or court channels, but intelligently, knowingly and voluntarily waives her right to do so.

2. She consents to the entry of the following **ORDER** affecting her license to practice social work in the State of West Virginia.

3.

ORDER

1. Ms. Saunders acknowledges this instrument serves as a formal reprimand that has resulted from inappropriate conduct as a social worker. Ms. Saunders acknowledges that this action, under Federal and State law, is a matter of public record. The reporting agent for the WV Board of Social Work Examiners to the Health Integrity Practitioners Data Bank is the Association of Social Work Boards.
2. Ms. Saunders will surrender her license to practice as a social worker for a period of six (6) months effective upon signing by herself and appropriate Board official.
3. Within one year of the effective date of this article, Ms. Saunders agrees to earn nine (9) additional hours of Board approved continuing education specific to professional ethics with emphasis in the areas of conflicts of interest, boundary issues, and appropriate conduct and decision making as a responsible professional. The specified hours in ethical education shall be earned in addition to the standard requirement of fifty (50) hours necessary for renewal. Ethics programs must be sponsored and presented by an approved or certified provider recognized by the WV Board of Social Work Examiners.
4. The Board recognizes that this Agreement is a compromise of a disputed claim and is not to be construed as an admission of liability or culpability on the part of Ms. Saunders.

Signature of Respondent: Jennifer Saunders

Date Signed: 6/23/03

Signature of Board Official: John M. Brown

Date Signed: July 29, 2003

Entered and agreed upon this the 29th day of July, 2003.

BOARD SEAL