

December 30, 2019

Alexis Podesta, Secretary
California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency
915 Capitol Mall, Suite 350-A
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Alexis Podesta,

In accordance with the State Leadership Accountability Act (Leadership Accountability), the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board submits this report on the review of our internal control and monitoring systems for the biennial period ending December 31, 2019.

Should you have any questions please contact Breanne Humphreys, Operations Manager, at (916) 561-8779, Breanne.Humphreys@dca.ca.gov.

GOVERNANCE

Mission and Strategic Plan

The Board's mission is to protect the people of California by promoting standards and enforcing the laws and regulations that ensure the qualifications and competence of providers of speech-language pathology, audiology and hearing aid dispensing services.

The Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board regulates the practices of speech-language pathology, audiology, and hearing aid dispensing in California by licensing those who meet minimum standards of competency. Among its functions, the Board promulgates laws and regulations; issues, renews, suspends, and revokes licenses; and imposes disciplinary sanctions, when necessary.

The Board has identified five strategic goals:

1. LICENSING - The Board ensures licensing standards that protect consumers while permitting reasonable access into the professions.

- Evaluate licensing and examination requirements for all disciplines to ensure fairness in the licensing processes.
- Shorten the licensing processing time (from application to issuance of the license) to better meet consumer and professional needs.
- Complete and submit a Budget Change Proposal (BCP) to request additional licensing positions to increase the availability of services, reduce processing times, streamline processes and meet professional demand.
- Increase the frequency and number of locations for the hearing aid dispenser's examination in order to increase access for applicants and more efficiently meet consumer demand for more licensed hearing aid dispensers.

2. ENFORCEMENT - The health and safety of California's consumers is protected through the active enforcement of the laws and regulations governing the practices of speech-language pathology, audiology and hearing aid dispensers.

- Decrease enforcement timeframes to enhance public protection.
- Inform interested parties regarding disciplinary actions to reduce the number of practitioner violations.
- Implement annual Board member enforcement training to improve Board member knowledge.
- Develop an ad-hoc Board member Enforcement Committee to discuss enforcement issues and review enforcement processes.
- Document the Board's enforcement policies and procedures to maintain an enforcement knowledge base.
- Assess staffing needs to determine whether staffing resources are adequate to manage current and anticipated workload.

3. OUTREACH - Consumers and other stakeholders are educated and informed about the practices, and laws and regulations governing the professions of speech-language pathology, audiology, and hearing aid dispensing.

- Require practitioners to display a consumer notice at the practitioner's point of service regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Board.
- Expand internet communication to encourage bi-directional communication to actively engage consumers, licensees and other stakeholders.
- Encourage stakeholder participation at Board meetings to obtain feedback, increase transparency and education of stakeholders.
- Complete and submit a BCP to request an additional outreach position to educate consumers, licensees, university faculty and staff, along with other stakeholders about the practices, laws, and regulations governing Board professions.
- Develop presentation materials for Board member use to cost-effectively disseminate information to consumers, licensees and students.

4. LAWS AND REGULATIONS - The health and safety of California consumers is protected by the laws and regulations governing the speech-language pathology, audiology and hearing aid dispensing professions.

- Update Continuing Education (CE) requirements to facilitate the license renewal process and improve ease of auditing.
- Complete and submit a BCP for a legislative analyst position to address the backlog of regulatory packages.
- Develop a Board member Laws and Regulations Committee to prioritize regulations and facilitate legislative analysis at Board meetings.
- Advocate for additional university programs graduating Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) to address the shortage of professionals in California in the interest of consumer access protection.
- Finalize existing regulation packages and proposals so that Board regulations remain current.
- Educate legislators on the importance of requiring SLPs and Audiologists who provide service in public schools to be licensed in order to improve consumer protection.

- Develop regulations regarding the appropriate level of supervision for trainees, aides, and assistants to safeguard consumer protection and seek statutory changes if necessary.
- Review examination regulations and make necessary changes to increase clarity for applicants and stakeholders.
- Seek statutory authority to require hearing aid dispenser applicants to complete a traineeship under a licensed hearing aid dispenser in order to become eligible to take the practical exam in the interest of consumer protection.
- Monitor federal regulation request for exemptions for online hearing aid sales in California to protect consumers and to improve clarity for licensees.

5. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION - The Board efficiently and effectively utilizes resources and personnel to meet our goals and objectives.

- Increase capacity for Board and Committee deliberations and progress in order to more effectively address a greater number of Board-related issues in a timely manner.
- Address staffing needs to determine whether resources are adequate to manage current and anticipated workload.
- Create, improve, and document all Board policies and procedures to streamline processes and maximize efficiency.
- Implement training for staff, Board members, subject matter experts (SMEs), and expert witnesses to maintain consistent communication and practices.
- Map existing Board processes in accordance with DCA release schedule to prepare for the BreEZe implementation.
- Identify Board processes that can be conducted electronically in order to increase staff efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction.
- Monitor and protect the Board's fund condition at the appropriate level to maintain the Board's fiscal needs.

Control Environment

Office guidelines and employee expectations are read and understood by all staff joining the Board. The guidelines and expectations are signed and dated by the employee.

The Board has a reporting structure which includes the Department of Consumer Affairs and the Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency.

The Board's organizational structure consists of three separate units: licensing, examinations, and enforcement. The licensing/administrative unit and examination unit has a lead licensing analyst who reports to the Operation Manager. The enforcement unit has an enforcement coordinator who reports to the Executive Officer. Each unit has written procedures on their respective processes to assist new employees in their training and development.

The Board has established a Board Member manual for issuance to new Board members.

The Board establishes relevant selection criteria and interview questions when recruiting staff. The Board collaborates with the Office of Human Resources to ensure eligibility is met prior to issuing a conditional offer of employment. Staff attend relevant training classes to their job positions and are encouraged to attend additional training that interests them.

Information and Communication

Internally, the Board has unit meetings at least monthly where the units examine their processes and make recommendations to enhance the programs workflow and the customer service that they deliver. At least on a quarterly basis, an all staff meeting is held with management and feedback is solicited on the operations of the three programs, examinations, licensing, and enforcement.

Externally, the Executive Officer conducts outreach efforts for the three professional associations that the Board licenses. The Board also updates its website regularly. The Board conducts its quarterly Board meetings in various locations across the state to encourage participation from stakeholders. These meetings are webcasted with live captioning for our hearing impaired stakeholders.

MONITORING

The information included here discusses the entity-wide, continuous process to ensure internal control systems are working as intended. The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Breanne Humphreys, Operations Manager.

The Board routinely meets one-on-one with staff to identify programmatic problems to enable management to respond to vulnerabilities.

Management performs ongoing reviews of completed staff work. The Board conducts an annual evaluation of the Executive Officer's performance, which reflects on the program's overall performance. The Board periodically undergoes comprehensive review of operations by external entities, such as Department of Consumer Affairs, the Bureau of State Audits, and the State Legislature (Sunset Review).

Program assessment is routine and ongoing, providing almost continuous opportunity for program improvement as vulnerabilities are identified. As vulnerabilities are identified, appropriate staff is assigned to ameliorate the vulnerability.

RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The following personnel were involved in the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board risk assessment process: executive management, front line management, and staff.

The following methods were used to identify risks: brainstorming meetings, employee engagement surveys, ongoing monitoring activities, and audit/review results.

The following criteria were used to rank risks: potential impact to mission/goals/objectives, and timing of potential event.

RISKS AND CONTROLS

Risk: Staff Recruitment and Retention

Prior to 2010, the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Board (SLPAB) governed these two professions. In 2010 the Hearing Aid Dispensers Bureau (HADB) merged with the SLPAB and the Board now oversees three professions. This merger brought on more administrative, licensing, enforcement, and legislative/regulation work for the Board.

The Board contracted with an outside agency to conduct a workload study on Board operations in 2015 - 2016. The report showed that the Board is understaffed. Budget change proposals have been submitted each year with one permanent licensing position approved, one limited term office technician and a limited term legislative and regulation position. Overtime is required throughout the year to make up for the shortage of staff.

With limited number of staff positions, training and cross-training of staff is hindered. The Board turnover has been high for 2018/2019. We lost three positions due to promotions. This has been a challenging time for our Board.

Control: Budget Change Proposals

The Board will continue to request permanent/temporary budget change proposals to increase staff and mitigate the need for overtime.

Risk: Business Modernization

The Board has entered into the first phase of its Business Modernization effort to analyze and improve operational systems that track, process and automate license and enforcement functions. The first phase of this effort is focused on business process documentation, analysis and improvement. Board management allocates staff as subject-matter experts to participate in the documenting of administrative, licensing, enforcement, legislative and regulatory functions. The Board has committed 12-16 staff hours per week to resource the current schedule. The participation of staff at this level may impact our core functions. Board staff had been working consistent overtime prior to engaging in the modernization effort.

Control: Monitor timelines

Monitor core business functions to assess and address increasing timelines.

Control: Overtime

Work overtime to maintain core function and participate as subject-matter experts.

Control: Negotiate modernization schedule

Negotiate an extended modernization schedule with all relevant stakeholders to decrease the current staff commitment.

Risk: Work Place Safety

The Board does not have bullet proof glass and a Kevlar door in its reception area. The Board office only has one entry/exit door. Employees have expressed concern on the lack of safety.

Control: Active shooter training.

Active shooter training was last conducted in a staff meeting on October 25, 2019 and will be held again as new employees on-board.

Control: New Office

The Board office is moving to a new location in 2020 and the office blueprint has a bullet proof reception area and two entry/exit doors.

Risk: Maintenance of Quorum

The Board is comprised of nine Board members: two speech-language pathologists, two audiologists, two hearing aid dispensers, and three public members. The Board has had a two-year vacancy for a hearing aid dispenser and a six-month vacancy for a speech-language pathologist. These two professions are impacted by not having another representative to weigh in on important Board business concerning these two professions. Additionally, if the Board fails to establish a quorum, the Board would be unable to meet to conduct Board business.

Control: Communication with Appointing Authorities

Executive staff (Executive Officer and DCA Executive Staff) maintains regular communication with DCA and Business Consumer Services and Housing Agency regarding the Board's vacancies.

CONCLUSION

The Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board strives to reduce the risks inherent in our work and accepts the responsibility to continuously improve by addressing newly recognized risks and revising risk mitigation strategies as appropriate. I certify our internal control and monitoring systems are adequate to identify and address current and potential risks facing the organization.

Paul Sanchez, Executive Officer

CC: California Legislature [Senate (2), Assembly (1)]
California State Auditor
California State Library
California State Controller
Director of California Department of Finance
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency