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James H. Bray, Ph.D., President
American Psychological Association
750 First St., N.E.
Washington, DC 20002-4242

Dear Dr. Bray,

I am writing to express strong concern about, and opposition to, the provisions in the proposed Model Licensure Act (MLA) that would remove the exemption in the current MLA for the use of the title “school psychologist” or “certified school psychologist” for those individuals who are so-certified by a state education agency and who are practicing in the public schools of that state. The current MLA, adopted by APA in 1987, includes this specific exemption. The previous MLA (APA, 1967) effectively included such an exemption because the 1967 version exempted all individuals who were providing services strictly within an organization and not offering fee-based services to the public. A similar rationale was included in APA’s original (1955) suggestions for licensure legislation. The proposed MLA seeks to overturn the specific exemption that has been in place for 20+ years, and the implied exemption in place since APA first articulated suggestions for legislation 50+ years ago, and does so without articulating any rationale for this proposed change. Additionally, the proposed MLA contains no provisions for “grandfathering” individuals currently so-credentialed, very likely raising serious restraint-of-trade issues should state legislatures or licensing boards adopt APA’s recommendations.

The current (1987) MLA contains a provision that after 1995 the exception to use of title shall only apply to individuals who have completed a training program that was accredited by a recognized specialized professional accrediting body. Currently, then, this exception applies only to those individuals who have completed a doctoral school psychology program accredited by APA or a specialist-level program approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) under the accreditation authority of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). (Graduates of APA-approved school psychology programs are not at issue with regard to the proposed changes in the MLA since such individuals are license-eligible.) Individuals graduating from NASP-approved programs have completed professional training at the “specialist” level, i.e., a program that requires, at minimum, two years of full-time graduate study, or the equivalent, including a one-year residency and additional completion of a minimum 1200-hour internship. Such individuals are well-prepared to provide school-based services that include assessment, consultation, and intervention within the school context.

Specialist-level school psychologists, i.e., those allowed under the current (1987) MLA to use the title “school psychologist” or “certified school psychologist”, provide quality educational and psychological services to children and adolescents who are experiencing school-based problems, and also provide valuable consultation at the classroom and school levels that strengthens the schools’ ability to promote achievement and social/emotional development. In many parts of the country, particularly outside of the Northeast, there is already a shortage of qualified personnel to fill these positions. Restrictions in title and practice beyond those already included in the current (1987) MLA are likely to have the effect of further decreasing the availability of such personnel.

There appears to be no compelling reason to change the exemption in the current MLA, and several indications that doing so will be problematic at the very least. It is likely that for this reason both APA Division 16 (School Psychology) and the Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs, which solely represents doctoral programs, support the retention of the current exemption in some form. I would urge APA to continue in its revised MLA the current Section J exemption for state-certified psychologists working in public schools, including the post-1995 provision that such exemption apply only to those individuals graduating from approved programs. It is also critical, both as an ethical and legal matter, that whatever changes in exemptions may be included (for school psychologists or others who may be affected by Section J changes) that sufficient “grandfathering” provisions be included such that currently credentialed individuals are not effectively “de-credentialed” in the absence of evidence of inadequate or insufficient professional performance.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Strein".

William Strein, D.Ed.
Associate Professor and Program Director
APA-Approved Ph.D. Program in School Psychology