

HB 2149 Testimony
February 15, 2017
House Health and Human Services
Sky Westerlund, LMSW

The Kansas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (KNASW) is the professional association working on behalf of the profession and practice of social work in Kansas. Social workers have been licensed at three levels of practice since 1976. These are the baccalaureate (LBSW), the master (LMSW), and the independent clinical social worker (LSCSW). The practice of social work is performed in many fields including adoptions, addictions, aging, child welfare, courts and corrections, corporations and businesses, domestic violence, early childhood, hospitals and health, hospice and palliative care, poverty prevention programs, mental health, community based prevention, problem gambling, pre-schools and schools, trauma, veterans and military, research and teaching, and more. We work in both the public and private sectors of the economy.

There are more than 7,400 social workers licensed to practice in Kansas. In fact, social workers are the largest group of mental health providers in Kansas, serving thousands every day. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, our profession is anticipated to grow by 12% from 2014 –2024. This is very good news for the profession and the Kansas communities we serve, as well as the Kansas economy.

Unfortunately, the current system of licensing and regulating social workers has not kept pace with this growth. That is why KNASW strongly supports HB 2149.

The Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB) composite board currently licenses and regulates social workers in Kansas. It was organized in 1980 to regulate two professions: psychology and social work. Now it regulates seven disciplines. With 7,463 licensed social workers, we are by far the largest group under the BSRB, numbering about 58% of all licensees. Social work is also the fastest growing mental health workforce in Kansas. In 2016, the agency licensed 569 new social workers. The other six disciplines combined gained 393 new licensees. However, despite our numbers, social workers are not well represented on the BSRB composite board, holding only two of the 12 seats. This means that social workers and the people we serve are subject to decisions made by those *who are not trained social workers*.

Poor representation on the board can have bad outcomes. For example, several years ago the BSRB approved granting a master social work license to an individual who had a record of five felonies —*including first-degree murder*. The board voted against the recommendations of the two social workers on the board. This decision undermined one of the core principles of the Kansas Social Workers Licensure Act: “...to protect the public by setting standards of qualification, training and experience for those who seek to engage in the practice of social work...” It underscores how far removed social workers have become from the decisions that affect our profession and the vulnerable people we work with everyday.

HB 2149 seeks to give social workers our voice in upholding the professional standards and responsibilities that our profession demands and our clients deserve. It establishes a new **Social Work Examining Committee** within the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board. The BSRB—as an agency—already provides the administrative support for social work licensure. It would continue to do so. It would continue to collect and deposit the licensure fees in the established fee fund for the agency. About \$500,000 is collected from social workers every year.

To be clear, this legislation has no impact on the state budget or the State General Fund. We as social workers pay for the privilege of being licensed to practice in the state of Kansas. In fact, 10% of social work licensure fees go *into* the State General Fund.

HB 2149 will change *who* makes the public protection decisions for licensed social workers. The Social Work Examining Committee will be comprised of five social workers and two public members. The committee will be responsible for regulating the practice of social work and the licensing of social workers, including addressing problem applications or renewals, resolving complaints, approval of clinical supervision training plans, and development of rules and regulations, including continuing education requirements.

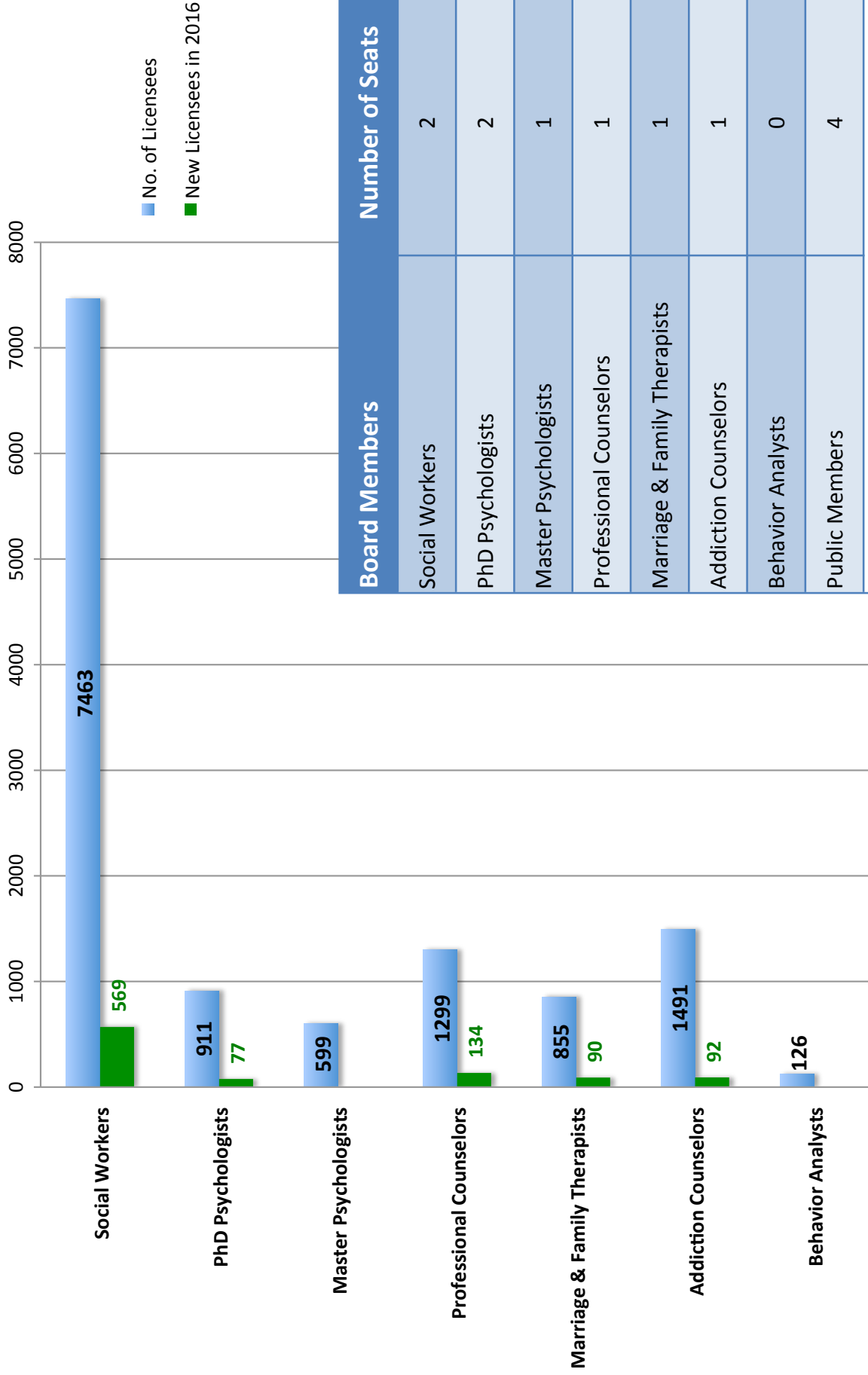
We are confident that the Social Work Examining Committee, through the peer-review process, will enhance public protection of the thousands of people served by social workers. It will achieve this goal without disrupting the current BSRB budget or interfering with the other six professions served by the BSRB. The composite BSRB board will remain to represent their interests.

KNASW asks for your support of HB 2149.

Two Charts:

- Chart showing the number of licensees and new licensees; representation on the composite board
- BSRB Budget: Total funds collected; expenditures; fees paid by social workers

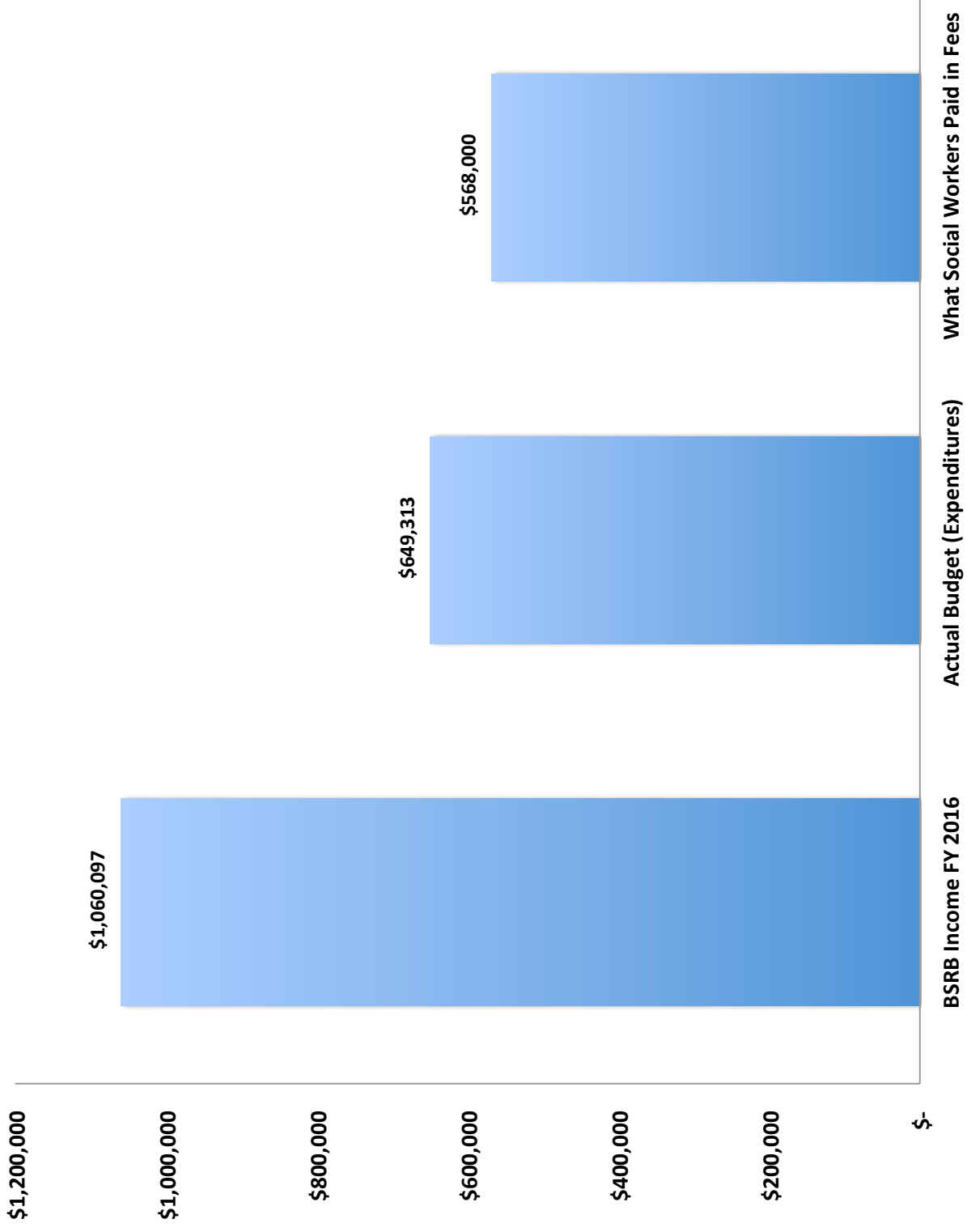
Professions Regulated By the BSRB



Board Members		Number of Seats
Social Workers		2
PhD Psychologists		2
Master Psychologists		1
Professional Counselors		1
Marriage & Family Therapists		1
Addiction Counselors		1
Behavior Analysts		0
Public Members		4

Source: BSRB Testimony, Feb. 7, 2017, House Higher Education Budget Committee

Source: BSRB Testimony, Dec. 6, 2016, Special Cmte. on Organization of Public Health Boards



Source: Provided by the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board, January 2017.