

CHAPTER 154C SOCIAL WORK

Referred to in [§135.24](#), [135L.3](#), [147.74](#), [147.76](#), [154D.2](#), [216.8C](#), [257.11](#), [257.41](#), [622.10](#), [714H.4](#), [915.82](#)

Enforcement, [§147.87](#), [147.92](#)
Penalty, [§147.86](#)

154C.1	Definitions.	154C.4	Rulemaking authority.
154C.2	License required — exception — use of title.	154C.5	Confidentiality of information.
154C.3	Requirements to obtain license or reciprocal license — license renewal — continuing education.	154C.6	Transition provisions — exemption from certain license requirements.
		154C.7	General exemptions.

154C.1 Definitions.

As used in [this chapter](#) unless the context otherwise requires:

1. “Board” means the board of behavioral health professionals established in [chapter 147](#).
2. “Licensee” means a person licensed to practice social work.

3. “Practice of social work” means the professional activity of licensees which is directed at enhancing or restoring people’s capacity for social functioning, whether impaired by environmental, emotional, or physical factors, with particular attention to the person-in-situation configuration. The social work profession represents a body of knowledge requiring progressively more sophisticated analytic and intervention skills, and includes the application of psychosocial theory methods to individuals, couples, families, groups, and communities. The practice of social work does not include the making of a medical diagnosis, or the treatment of conditions or disorders of biological etiology except treatment of conditions or disorders which involve psychosocial aspects and conditions. The practice of social work for each of the categories of social work licensure includes the following:

a. Bachelor social workers provide psychosocial assessment and intervention through direct contact with clients or referral of clients to other qualified resources for assistance, including but not limited to performance of social histories, problem identification, establishment of goals and monitoring of progress, interviewing techniques, counseling, social work administration, supervision, evaluation, interdisciplinary consultation and collaboration, and research of service delivery including development and implementation of organizational policies and procedures in program management.

b. Master social workers are qualified to perform the practice of bachelor social workers and provide psychosocial assessment, diagnosis, and treatment, including but not limited to performance of psychosocial histories, problem identification and evaluation of symptoms and behavior, assessment of psychosocial and behavioral strengths and weaknesses, effects of the environment on behavior, psychosocial therapy with individuals, couples, families, and groups, establishment of treatment goals and monitoring progress, differential treatment planning, and interdisciplinary consultation and collaboration.

c. Independent social workers are qualified to perform the practice of master social workers as a private practice.

4. “Private practice” means social work practice conducted only by an independent social worker who is either self-employed or a member of a partnership or of a group practice providing diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders or conditions.

5. “Supervision” means the direction of social work practice in face-to-face sessions.

[84 Acts, ch 1075, §1](#); [96 Acts, ch 1035, §5](#); [2007 Acts, ch 10, §147](#); [2024 Acts, ch 1170, §504](#)
Referred to in [§154C.6](#)

154C.2 License required — exception — use of title.

1. A person shall not engage in the practice of social work unless the person is licensed pursuant to [this chapter](#). A person who is not licensed pursuant to [this chapter](#) shall not use

words or titles which imply or represent that the person is a licensed bachelor social worker, licensed master social worker, or licensed independent social worker.

2. Notwithstanding [subsection 1](#), persons trained as bachelor social workers, or employed as bachelor social workers, are not required to be licensed.

3. [Section 147.83](#) does not apply to persons who are not licensed as bachelor social workers and who do not hold themselves out as licensed bachelor social workers.

[84 Acts, ch 1075, §2](#); [96 Acts, ch 1035, §6](#)

154C.3 Requirements to obtain license or reciprocal license — license renewal — continuing education.

1. *License requirements.* An applicant for a license as a bachelor social worker, master social worker, or independent social worker shall meet the following requirements in addition to paying all fees required by the board:

a. *Bachelor social worker.* An applicant for a license as a bachelor social worker shall present evidence satisfactory to the board that the applicant:

(1) Possesses a bachelor's degree in social work from an accredited college or university approved by the board.

(2) Has passed an examination given by the board.

(3) Will conduct all professional activities as a bachelor social worker in accordance with standards for professional conduct established by the board.

b. *Master social worker.* An applicant for a license as a master social worker shall present evidence satisfactory to the board that the applicant:

(1) Possesses a master's or doctoral degree in social work from an accredited college or university approved by the board.

(2) Has passed an examination given by the board.

(3) Will conduct all professional activities as a master social worker in accordance with standards for professional conduct established by the board.

c. *Independent social worker.* An applicant for a license as an independent social worker shall present evidence satisfactory to the board that the applicant:

(1) Possesses a master's or doctoral degree in social work from an accredited college or university approved by the board.

(2) Has passed an examination given by the board.

(3) Will conduct all professional activities as a social worker in accordance with standards for professional conduct established by the board.

(4) Has engaged in the practice of social work, under supervision, for at least two years as a full-time employee or for four thousand hours prior to taking the examination given by the board.

(a) Supervision shall be provided in any of the following manners:

(i) By a social worker licensed at least at the level of the social worker being supervised and qualified under [this section](#) to practice without supervision.

(ii) By a person licensed under [section 154D.2](#) to practice marital and family therapy without supervision or mental health counseling without supervision.

(iii) By another qualified professional, if the board determines that supervision by a social worker as defined in subparagraph subdivision (i) is unobtainable or in other situations considered appropriate by the board.

(b) Additional standards for supervision shall be determined by the board.

2. *Reciprocal license.* The board shall issue an appropriate license to an applicant licensed to practice social work in another state which imposes licensure requirements similar or equal to those imposed under [subsection 1](#).

3. *License renewal and continuing education.* Licenses shall be renewed biennially, and licensees shall pay a fee for renewal as determined by the board and shall present evidence satisfactory to the board that the licensee has satisfied continuing education requirements as determined by the board. The board shall not limit the number of continuing education credits that may be obtained online in satisfying continuing education requirements, provided that any program providing continuing education credits online shall comply with standards set by the board.

4. *Supervision.* The board shall not, by rule or other means, require that supervision be completed in person or that supervised clinical experience include live or recorded direct observation of client interaction as a condition for an applicant to receive a license, a reciprocal license, or a renewed license under [this chapter](#).

[84 Acts, ch 1075, §3](#); [96 Acts, ch 1035, §7](#); [2000 Acts, ch 1140, §40](#); [2007 Acts, ch 10, §148](#); [2009 Acts, ch 41, §263](#); [2009 Acts, ch 133, §60](#); [2019 Acts, ch 83, §1](#); [2021 Acts, ch 182, §56, 57, 62](#); [2022 Acts, ch 1021, §45, 46](#); [2024 Acts, ch 1080, §1, 4](#)

Referred to in [§154C.6, 249A.15A, 489.1101, 496C.2, 514C.32](#)

154C.4 Rulemaking authority.

In addition to duties and responsibilities provided in [chapters 147](#) and [272C](#), the board shall adopt rules relating to:

1. Standards required for licensees engaging in the private practice of licensed social work.
2. Standards for professional conduct of licensees.
3. The administration of [this chapter](#).
4. The status of active and inactive licensure and guidelines for inactive licensure reentry.
5. Educational activities which fulfill continuing education requirements for renewal of licenses.
6. Evaluation of its rules to refine standards of licensure and improve methods of enforcement of the standards.

[84 Acts, ch 1075, §4](#); [96 Acts, ch 1035, §8](#)

154C.5 Confidentiality of information.

A licensee or a person working under supervision of a licensee shall not disclose or be compelled to disclose information acquired from persons consulting that person in a professional capacity except:

1. If the information reveals the contemplation or commission of a crime.
2. If the person waives the privilege by bringing charges against the licensee.
3. With the written consent of the client, or in the case of death or disability with the consent of the client's personal representative, another person authorized to sue, or the beneficiary of an insurance policy on the client's life, health, or physical condition.
4. To testify in a court hearing concerning matters pertaining to the welfare of children.
5. To seek collaboration or consultation with professional colleagues or administrative superiors on behalf of the client.

[84 Acts, ch 1075, §5](#); [96 Acts, ch 1035, §9](#)

154C.6 Transition provisions — exemption from certain license requirements.

Notwithstanding [section 154C.3](#), the board shall issue a license as a bachelor social worker, master social worker, or independent social worker to an applicant applying for a license prior to July 1, 1998, who meets the following requirements in addition to paying all fees required by the board:

1. *Bachelor social worker.* An applicant for a license as a bachelor social worker shall present evidence satisfactory to the board of either of the following:

- a. That the applicant possesses a bachelor's degree in social work from an accredited college or university approved by the board.
- b. That the applicant possesses an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university and has four thousand hours of employment experience in the practice of social work.

2. *Master social worker.* An applicant for a license as a master social worker shall present evidence satisfactory to the board of any of the following:

- a. That the applicant possesses a master's degree in social work from an accredited college or university approved by the board.
- b. That the applicant possesses a graduate degree from an accredited college or university and has four thousand hours of employment experience in the practice of social work.
- c. That the applicant is employed performing master level social work duties as defined in

section 154C.1, subsection 3, paragraph “b”, as of July 1, 1996, and has four thousand hours of employment experience in the practice of social work as of July 1, 1998.

3. *Independent social worker.* An applicant for a license as an independent social worker shall present evidence satisfactory to the board of either of the following:

a. That the applicant possesses a valid license to practice social work pursuant to [this chapter](#) issued prior to July 1, 1996.

b. That the applicant possesses a master’s or doctoral degree in social work from an accredited college or university approved by the board and has two years or four thousand hours of postgraduate degree employment experience in the practice of social work.

[96 Acts, ch 1035, §10](#)

154C.7 General exemptions.

1. [This chapter](#) and [chapter 147](#) do not prevent qualified members of other professions including but not limited to nurses, psychologists, marital and family therapists, mental health counselors, physicians, physician assistants, attorneys at law, or members of the clergy, from providing or advertising that they provide services of a social work nature consistent with the accepted standards of their respective professions, provided that these persons do not use a title or description indicating or implying that they are licensed to practice social work under [this chapter](#) or that they are practicing social work as defined in [this chapter](#).

2. [This chapter](#) does not apply to students of social work whose activities are conducted within a course of professional education in social work.

[96 Acts, ch 1035, §11](#); [2020 Acts, ch 1062, §94](#)