

December 28, 2023

Melinda Grant, Undersecretary  
California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency  
500 Capitol Mall, Suite 1850  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Undersecretary Melinda Grant,

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, 2023.

Should you have any questions please contact Cherise Burns, Assistant Executive Officer, at (916) 287-7915, [Cherise.Burns@dca.ca.gov](mailto:Cherise.Burns@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 Board's Strategic Goals are as follows:

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

Goal 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 dispensing.

Goal 3: Outreach and Communications - 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.

Goal 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.

Goal 5: Program Administration - The Board is committed to efficiently and effectively utilize resources and personnel to meet our goals and objectives.

### **Control Environment**

The Board establishes an effective control environment through the use of various accountability and reporting mechanisms and administrative controls. Examples of Board controls are as follows:

- The Board has a reporting structure that includes the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) and the Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency.
- The Board has established a Board member manual for issuance to new members.
- The Board's Executive Officer (EO) reports at least quarterly to the Board on the performance and operations of Board units and the EO is held accountable through annual performance evaluations.
- The Board's EO and Assistant Executive Officer (AEO) keep Board staff accountable for the performance of the Board's work through individual and unit level measures.
- The Board's organizational structure consists of three separate units: administration, enforcement, and licensing and examinations. The Board is staffed by a Staff Services Manager I (SSM I) reporting directly to the EO and who serves as the AEO. The Board has one Special Investigator reporting directly to the EO and serves as the Enforcement Unit lead. The remaining staff, report directly to the AEO. The clerical staff in the Administration Unit report to the lead Licensing Unit coordinator and the Policy staff report directly to the AEO.
- Office guidelines and employee expectations are read and agreed to by all staff. The Board follows established human resources protocols and best practices when recruiting, selecting, and hiring staff. 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: administration, enforcement, and licensing and examinations.

Externally, the EO conducts outreach efforts with the three professional organizations associated with the Board's licensed occupations. The Board utilizes targeted email listservs to distribute relevant information, such as for Board meetings, changes within the Board's laws and regulations, and enforcement actions taken by the Board. The Board conducts its quarterly Board meetings in various locations across the state and whenever possible, utilizes online meeting platforms that provide for greater participation from a more diverse group of participants. Meetings are also webcast with live captioning for hearing-impaired participants.

## **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: The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Board's monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Paul Sanchez, Executive Officer and Cherise Burns, Assistant Executive Officer..

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. Examples of monitoring of internal controls include:

- Management conducts one-on-one and unit meetings with staff to identify programmatic problems to enable management to respond to vulnerabilities.
- Management performs ongoing reviews of completed staff work and quarterly reviews of performance measures in both licensing and enforcement. Monthly check-in meetings with policy staff in the administration unit also ensure adequate progress is being made on Board policy priorities.
- The Board conducts an annual evaluation of the EO's performance, which reflects on the program's overall performance.
- The Board periodically undergoes comprehensive review of operations by external entities, such as DCA, the Bureau of State Audits, and the State Legislature (Sunset Review).

## **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, middle management, and front line management.

The following methods were used to identify risks: brainstorming meetings, and other/prior risk assessments.

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

## **RISKS AND CONTROLS**

### **Risk: Insufficient Data Reporting and Auditing Resources**

The Board is understaffed, as the office is funded for only 14.6 positions yet is responsible for the oversight of over 39,000 licensees and the processing of over 5,400 applications for licensure annually. This responsibility includes all aspects of licensing, examinations, enforcement, development of regulations, continuing education provider approval, and licensee continuing education audits.

Currently, the Board is utilizing a significant amount of staff overtime hours to address business operations, but it is still unable to meet all its mission critical workload demands. Some of the mission critical workload that the Board has been unable to meet due to significant

understaffing includes the following:

- **Data Reporting and Analysis** - The Board's current staffing and resource limitations limits its ability to produce reports and/or data required by legislation, the Legislature, DCA, and other entities, to support decision-making, performance evaluation, and transparency to the public. This includes difficulties providing timely and/or complete reports to stakeholders including the Legislature, the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, and DCA.
- **Continuing Education Audits** - The Board has been unable to conduct random continuing education (CE) audits on an annual basis. Due to staffing and resource limitations, the Board has not consistently conducted CE audits of its licensees, having completed its last CE audit in 2018.

**Control: Research Feasibility of Automating Continuing Education Audits**

The Board will research the feasibility of electronically collecting and monitoring completion of CE hours by its licensees.

**Control: Monitoring Staffing and Workload related to Data Reporting and Auditing Needs**

The Board was approved for a permanent analyst position dedicated to conducting CE audits in fiscal year 2023-24 and expects to complete its first CE audit within the year. The Board will continue to monitor the CE auditing workload.

The Board will assess the data reporting workload and may request a budget augmentation, as its fund condition permits, for additional permanent staff to address data reporting workload required of the Board. This augmentation will include identifying data reporting workload required throughout the fiscal year as well as monitoring new legislative proposals that could increase reporting workload and require additional staff resources.

**Risk: Lack of Formal Training Programs for Board Subject Matter Experts**

The Board utilizes licensee subject matter experts (SME) for licensing, examination, and enforcement support but lacks a formal training program developed for these SMEs, which could improve the quality and efficacy of the Board's program areas.

**Control: Develop and Implement Formal Training Programs for Board Subject Matter Experts**

The Board will research, develop, and implement formal SME training programs.

**Risk: Lack of Adequate Resources for Clear and Timely Communication**

The Board lacks adequate resources to continuously update information on its website and answer the volume of phone calls and emails from applicants and licensees related to licensing and enforcement.

**Control: Identify Resources to Improve Communication**

The Board will research ways to improve the clarity and timeliness of information on its website and utilize technology to improve timely communications with its applicants and licensees.

**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, Assembly]  
California State Auditor  
California State Library  
California State Controller  
Director of California Department of Finance  
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency