

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL  
LICENSURE AND CERTIFICATION**

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**BOARD OF MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE**

**In Re: Lauren Leicht, (f/k/a Lauren Catano)  
LICSW Lic. #2460**

Docket No. 2022-MHP--009

**FINAL DECISION AND ORDER**

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**I. ATTENDEES:**

Gary E. Goodnough, Ph.D., LCMHC, Board Chair  
Amy Alletzhauser, D.Min., LPP, Board Member  
Samuel Rosario, LICSW, Board Member  
Sheryl L. Reasoner, LCMHC, MLADC, Board Member  
Ashley Czechowicz, Administrator  
Nikolas K. Frye, Esq., Presiding Officer  
Lauren Leicht, Mhp. Applicant

**II. CASE SUMMARY/PROCEDURAL HISTORY:**

On or about 03/14/22, the Board of Mental Health Practice (“Board”) received communication from Lauren Leicht, f/k/a Lauren Catano, (“Licensee”), stating she had entered into a Consent Agreement involving her license to practice as a clinical social worker in the State of Maine. The Consent Agreement, which the Licensee provided with the communication, states that the Licensee accepted the following discipline: a reprimand and a surrender of her Maine clinical social worker license, effective March 31, 2021. After reviewing the correspondence and Consent Agreement, the Board voted on 03/18/22 to initiate a disciplinary proceeding. The Board hereby issues this Notice of Show Cause Hearing to begin this adjudicative, disciplinary proceeding. The purpose of the hearing is to learn why reciprocal action should not be taken in New Hampshire in relation to the disciplinary action taken by the State of Maine against Licensee.

### **III. SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE:**

The Board received the following evidence pursuant to RSA 541-A:33 and Rules 208.10(c) and 504.10:

A. Exhibits were submitted by the Board and Licensee as follows:

1. Letter from Licensee to the Board, dated 03/14/22;
2. State of Maine State Board of Social Worker Licensure Consent Agreement, In Re Lauren Elizabeth Catano, LCSW, Case No. 2021-SOC-17170, approved 03/08/22;
3. Letter from Licensee to the Board, received 03/31/22;
4. Court Paperwork related to Restraining Order

B. Testimony was received from:

1. Lauren Leicht, Licensee

### **IV. CONDUCT OF THE HEARING AND EVIDENCE PRESENTED:**

Pursuant to Rule 505.03(a), the Board ordered the Licensee to appear and demonstrate why reciprocal discipline should not be imposed in New Hampshire where Maine had disciplined her license to practice as a clinical social worker. The Board conducted this adjudicative disciplinary show cause hearing pursuant to RSA 330-A:29(I). Present for the hearing were a quorum of the Board, the Presiding Officer, and Licensee. At the outset, the Board addressed the purpose of the hearing and reviewed the procedure it would follow during it. The Licensee indicated she had no further documentation to submit as exhibits other than what she had presented to the Board in advance of the hearing.<sup>1</sup> She next moved to have the hearing held in non-public pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II(c), given the nature of the factual circumstances surrounding the Maine disciplinary case. The Board approved the Motion by roll call vote and the hearing was held in non-public. Pursuant to Rule 504.13 and 505.03(a), Licensee has the burden of proving her case by a preponderance of the evidence. The Board admitted all exhibits and the Licensee was sworn in under oath and offered testimony. In accordance with the Board's Order to hold the matter

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<sup>1</sup> What was submitted by Licensee are listed as Exhibits 1-4 above.

in non-public, the Presiding Officer hereby seals Exhibit 4. The credible evidence presented at the hearing allows the Board to find the following facts.

Licensee holds Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (“LICSW”) license number 2460 in the State of New Hampshire and previously held Licensed Clinical Social Worker license number LC16468 in the State of Maine. *See* Exhibit 2. On 03/08/22, the State of Maine State Board of Social Worker Licensure approved “Consent Agreement, In Re Lauren Elizabeth Catano, LCSW, Case No. 2021-SOC-17170” (“Agreement”) in a disciplinary matter involving the Licensee. Exh. 2. The Board adopts the findings of fact contained in the section of the Agreement labeled “FACTS” and listed in paragraphs 1 through 8 on pages 1 and 2. As noted in the Agreement, “[the Licensee] admits to the facts as state [therein] ...” Exh. 2. The Licensee also did not dispute the findings of fact in the Agreement but did offer clarification through the other Exhibits and her testimony. The basic facts upon which Maine approved the Agreement were that she had engaged in a friendship with a former client in May of 2019 that later developed into a romantic relationship. The friendship started approximately one month after Licensee last provided social work services to the client and sexual contact between them occurred February and March of 2020— after the Licensee and former client had moved to California and lived together in January of 2020.

The licensee testified that she notified the Board about her discipline in Maine soon after its board approved the Agreement. She represented that the process took 14 months and that she had settled because she wanted to be “done with it”, as she had no reason or desire to practice in Maine. The litigation had already cost her a substantial amount in legal fees. She clarified that her understanding was that the previous prosecutor for Maine’s Board would not entertain a settlement agreement and that she had entered into the Agreement soon after a new prosecutor was assigned the case. Her testimony revealed she had accepted the discipline (a reprimand and voluntary surrender of her license) because she was

willing to have a conversation about the matter with this Board. She later explained during Board questioning that she had relocated to New Hampshire recently and was working at Care Counseling until about a month ago. She had represented in her 03/14/22 letter to the Board that she had been working there “the past 14 months.” Exh. 1.

The Licensee also provided more specific detail related to the underlying cause of the discipline during testimony. She explained that her therapeutic relationship with the client occurred at Maine Medical Center where she had worked as a supervisor for four years. She indicated she left the position in May of 2019 but that was coincidental. She acknowledged that the relationship with the former patient became romantic at one point in 2019 but not early in the friendship. She stated that she had left the former client in June of 2020 and had not seen him since. Her testimony and Exhibit 4 demonstrate she had obtained a restraining order in relation to the former client, which is still effective. The Licensee acknowledged that her decision to have a relationship with the former client was a bad choice and she regretted it.

Board questioning revealed that another hospital employee had supplied the former client with the Licensee’s email address after the Licensee had left the hospital. It was unclear from Licensee’s testimony whether the employee had sought her permission to send the contact information. The Licensee explained that others at the hospital had connected with the former client on social media after he was discharged, held a going away party for him, and gave him cards. After the former client left the hospital, he called the hospital a couple of times to see how everyone was doing. The Licensee stated that sometime after she had left employ at the hospital, the former client sent her an email and they began discussing books through that mode of communication. From there, she testified, things “snowballed”. She intimated that the former client had indicated to her that she could not “get in trouble” for being in the relationship with him because

he would have to file a complaint for that to happen and he would not. Later during her testimony, she stated he had threatened to report her to the Maine board if she did not continue with the relationship.

Board questioning also clarified that she had provided a biopsychosocial assessment related to services he would get at the hospital and conducted his intake. While the former client was there for “purely medical reasons”, the Licensee agreed she was fulfilling a clinical role and should not have blurred the boundaries of her professional relationship with the former client by engaging in a friendship and romantic relationship. Finally, the Licensee argued that she regrets what she did but there was no harm done to the former client. She explained she has been working in the field since 2018 and loves her work. She testified that she did not mean for this to happen. She felt that she has been transparent with everyone involving this matter as demonstrated by her notifying the Board soon after she received discipline. She stated she did not tell the Board or her employer about the incident before the Agreement because there was no official finding of misconduct. She requested the Board consider any option of discipline where she could continue to practice, if it decided to sanction her.

**V. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS OF FACTS / CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

After reviewing all the evidence, and accounting for the presentation and demeanor of all the witnesses, the Board finds the Licensee has failed to meet her burden of proof, by a preponderance of the evidence that “reciprocal action should not be imposed in New Hampshire.” Rule 505.03(a). The central facts in this matter are clear. Licensee “engaged in a friendship with [a former client] that developed into a dating relationship.” Exh. 2. The friendship started approximately a month after the professional relationship terminated and turned romantic in late 2019, early 2020. As Licensee clarified during Board questioning, she provided a biopsychosocial assessment for the former client during her duties at the hospital, which made her privy to sensitive information about the former client. The former client’s conduct toward the Licensee, no matter how reprehensible the Board might find it, does not change the

fact that the Licensee, intentionally or not, violated the boundaries of her professional responsibilities as a Licensee. Although peripheral to the Board's analysis, the Licensee also waited to disclose this conduct to the Board until resolution of the matter in the State of Maine.

Even taking in account the compassionate "human" element, the rules governing mental health professionals exist to prevent and deter potential harm to clients and the public. Ultimately, the Licensee is the professional who has ethical responsibilities. Licensee should have taken affirmative steps to eschew an intimate relationship with the client. It is clear to the Board that Licensee pursued a non-professional relationship with the client almost immediately after he was discharged from the hospital, going so far as to have friend-like communication with him a month later, which later blossomed into a romantic relationship with him in late 2019, cohabitation by January of 2020, and sexual relations by February of 2020. Consequently, the Board finds that Licensee has committed professional misconduct. As part of this decision, the Board makes the following specific findings of fact and conclusions of law:

- A. During all relevant times, Licensee was a LICSW in the State of New Hampshire, holding license number 2460.
- B. On 03/08/22, the State of Maine State Board of Social Worker Licensure approved "Consent Agreement, In Re Lauren Elizabeth Catano, LCSW, Case No. 2021-SOC-17170" ("Agreement") in a disciplinary matter involving the Licensee. Exh. 2. The Board adopts the findings of fact contained in the section of the Agreement labeled "FACTS" and listed in paragraphs 1 through 8 on pages 1 and 2. The Licensee does not contest those facts. *See* Exh. 2.
- C. Based upon the findings of fact in this final order, the Board additionally finds that the Licensee is deficient in the following areas: 1) professional boundaries, especially as it pertains to sexual issues and 2) insight into her misconduct.
- D. Pursuant to Rule 505.03(a), and based upon the findings of facts stated herein, the Board concludes that New Hampshire should impose reciprocal action to that taken in the State of Maine. The Board further concludes that Paragraphs E, F, G, H, and I below represents equal or lesser reciprocal action under the laws of New Hampshire.
- E. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(II)(c), Licensee engaged in professional misconduct in that she engaged in unprofessional or dishonorable conduct, unworthy of and affecting the practice of the profession, specifically by engaging in a friendship and then an intimate relationship with a former client in the manner specified in the findings of fact.

- F. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:36, Licensee engaged in professional misconduct in that she engaged in sexual relations with a former client.
- G. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(II)(i) and Rule 501.02(a)(2), Licensee engaged in other misconduct according to the ethical requirements applicable at the time, specifically by violating the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, Ethical Standards 1.06(c) and 1.09(c), by engaging in dual or multiple relationships with the former client that included a sexual relationship and posed a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the former client.
- H. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III)(b) and Rule 505.02, and upon a finding of professional misconduct under section (II) above, the Board orders that Licensee's license to practice as a LICSW shall be suspended for a period of two years, commencing from the signed date of this order. At the end of the suspension, the Licensee shall request a show cause hearing before the Board to determine if: 1) she has completed the 12 hours of continuing education courses in professional boundaries (with 6 of such hours involving sexual issue) as detailed in Paragraph I; 2) she is engaged in the treatment herein ordered as detailed in Paragraph J; and 3) she could begin to practice under corrective supervision without posing a danger to the public or clients. No sooner than one year after the suspension is commenced, the Licensee may request an earlier show cause hearing to determine the same issues.
- I. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III)(d) and Rule 505.02, and upon a finding of professional misconduct under section (II) above, the Board orders that Licensee complete 12 hours of continuing education course hours in professional boundaries (with 6 of such hours involving sexual boundaries).
- J. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III)(d) and Rule 505.02, and upon a finding of professional misconduct under section (II) above, the Board orders that Licensee engage in therapy to assist her in gaining insight into the circumstances surrounding the Licensee's professional misconduct.
- K. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III) and Rule 505.02(a), the Board, in imposing the above-referenced sanctions, considered the following factors: the Board's desire to protect public health and safety and deter future misconduct by the Licensee; the Licensee's open acknowledgement of fault and her cooperation at the hearing; the need to correct any attitudinal, educational or other deficiencies which led to the licensee's misconduct; its duty to encourage the responsible practice of mental health; and the Board's strong desire to demonstrate to Licensee and the public that it wishes to insure that Licensee practices in accordance with applicable law and the public welfare.
- L. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III) and Rule 505.02(b) and (c), the Board, in imposing the above-referenced sanctions, considered the following additional factors: the obvious wrongfulness of the act or omission committed by Licensee; whether there was demonstrable physical or mental harm to the client; the strong *potential* to cause physical or mental harm to the client; the lack of any prior disciplinary record; and the intentional nature of the Licensee's misconduct.

**VI. CONCLUSION AND DECISION:**

Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27 and 29(V), the Board hereby SUSPENDS Lauren Leicht's license as a LICSW, and subjects her to further discipline as outlined above.

DATED: 4/25/2022

\_\_\_\_\_/s/ Nikolas K. Frye, Esq.\_\_\_\_\_  
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