

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

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**BOARD OF MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE**

**In Re: Isabel Senter (f/k/a Isabel John),  
Mhp. License #1262**

Docket No. 2020-006

**FINAL DECISION AND ORDER**

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**I. ATTENDEES:**

Todd H. Prevett, Presiding Officer  
Deb Kennedy, Chairperson  
Samuel Rosario, Board Member  
Sheryl Reasoner, Board Member  
Gary Goodnough, Board Member  
Diane Vaccarello, Board Member, via Special Appointment  
Page Cannon, Investigator for Board Sub-Committee  
Attorney John Brown, Hearing Counsel  
Attorney Brian Quirk, Counsel for Licensee  
Isabel Senter, Licensee  
Peter Dal Pra, Observer  
Ashley Czechowicz, Administrator

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

On or about 05/16/19, the Board of Mental Health Practice ("Board") received information that Ms. Isabel John (n/k/a Isabel Senter, hereafter "Licensee") allegedly committed professional misconduct by having an intimate relationship with a client/former client. On 08/06/19, the Board received a formal complaint with additional information. On or about 09/23/2020, after an investigation, the Board commenced an adjudicative disciplinary proceeding pursuant to RSA 330-A:29. A final adjudicative hearing was held on 12/18/20 at 10:00 am. Pursuant to N.H. Code Admin. R. Mhp 503.01(o)("Rules"), Todd H. Prevett, Esq. was appointed by the Board as presiding officer.

**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 Hearing Counsel, numbered as follows:

1. New Hampshire Online Licensing information for Isabel John;
2. Preliminary Written Response to Communication of Alleged Misconduct, dated 06/21/19;
3. Licensee's email to Rebecca Sartor, dated 04/07/17;
4. Letter from Rebecca Sartor, dated 05/10/19;
5. Licensee's email to Coleen Barry, dated 07/10/19;
6. Complaint of Coleen Barry, dated 08/01/19;
7. Letter from Dr. John Matthew, dated 12/01/20;
8. Letter from Gabriel Senter, dated 12/03/20;
9. Joint Stipulation of Fact, dated 10/21/20

B. Testimony was received from:

1. Isabel Senter, Licensee

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

After receiving a complaint and ordering an investigation, the Board conducted this adjudicative disciplinary hearing pursuant to RSA 330-A:29(I) on 12/18/20 where Licensee appeared with counsel Brian Quirk. The Board addressed various procedural questions regarding exhibits and took a brief recess so that Board members could review various exhibits beforehand. Pursuant to Rule 504.13, Hearing Counsel has the burden of proving its case by a preponderance of the evidence, and Hearing Counsel moved to admit all evidentiary exhibits, which was allowed by the Board. Licensee and Hearing Counsel filed a comprehensive stipulation of fact, which was accepted by the Board and substantially incorporated into this Order. The stipulation of facts and other credible evidence presented at the hearing allows the Board to find the following facts.

Licensee is a LCMHC first licensed in New Hampshire on 06/09/17. Her license is due to expire on 06/09/21. Licensee was employed as a counselor at The Counseling Center of New England ("Counseling Center") in Nashua both before and after obtaining her licensure. During Licensee's period of employment, Rebecca Sartor, LICSW ("Sartor") was the Counseling Center's executive director and part of its management team. Beginning in April 2016 and continuing until April 2017, Licensee provided counseling services for a client ("the client") at the Counseling Center. The counseling took the form of primarily in-person therapy sessions and at a later point in time, what

Licensee described as "coaching calls" by telephone. The client was being treated for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") and Dissociative Identity Disorder ("DID"). During the period that Licensee provided services to the client, Licensee was a candidate for licensure and received clinical supervision from another Counseling Center employee, Colleen Barry, LCMHC ("Barry"). On some occasions, the client suffered shaking seizures during counseling sessions. Related to her DID, the client sometimes presented alternate personalities ("alters"), some of which manifested themselves as children.

Licensee asked Counseling Center management for assistance in obtaining insurance provider approval to increase frequency and length of counseling sessions with client, but never discussed her developing feelings with client. In March of 2017, Licensee and the client had developed "plutonic (*sic*, platonic), but personal" feelings for each other. These feelings were first raised by the client and then discussed by both of them during a coaching call and a few in-person counseling sessions. On 04/07/17, Licensee sent an email to Sartor informing her that her client's seizures were less frequent, she was doing well, and was stable enough to take a "therapeutic break." On 04/07/17, Licensee terminated client's counseling. Licensee states that she proactively terminated the counseling relationship, as soon as she became aware of her personal feelings towards client. On cross-examination by the Board, Licensee did admit that her termination of services was motivated (at least in part) by her personal feelings for client and not by therapeutic gains. On cross-examination, the Licensee gave the following simplified timeline:

- 04/07/17: Licensee and client terminated their professional relationship
- c. 08/2017: Licensee and client moved in together
- c. 08/2018: Licensee and client began their dating/intimate relationship
- 10/2018: Licensee and client got married
- 05/14/2019: Licensee resigned from her position
- 07/10/2019: Licensee disclosed her behavior to her employer.

Licensee continued to work at the Counseling Center. Licensee reluctantly testified that she maintained contact with the client immediately after termination of their professional relationship. It started with Licensee and the client getting together to talk on a weekly basis. Licensee tearfully stated that she had no one else to talk to about her struggles with her own personal issues, which included questioning her own sexual identity. Licensee states that it was very difficult for her to be honest about coming out. Licensee had not even disclosed her feelings to her family at this point. The relationship steadily progressed to where Licensee and the client were regularly getting together for meals, and then

they moved in together in the fall of 2017. Licensee admits that this was her mistake, where she did not allow sufficient time and distance between terminating the professional relationship and ramping up their personal relationship.

Licensee states that, only in August 2018, did Licensee and the client initiate an "intimate" relationship. The Board questions the accuracy of this statement, as it requires the Board to accept the fact that Licensee and client began living together in August 2017, yet they did not initiate an intimate relationship until shortly before they were married in October of 2018. The Board gives very little evidentiary weight to this claim by Licensee. Following her marriage to the client, Licensee changed her last name and her address. She reported those changes to Counseling Center management, but did not discuss that her spouse was a former client.

In May of 2019, Sartor observed Licensee and her client together and suspected that they were involved in a relationship. Sartor presented her suspicions to Licensee. Licensee resigned her position from the Counseling Center on 05/14/19. On 05/16/19, Sartor filed a complaint with the Board. Barry had left the Counseling Center prior to Licensee's resignation. In an email dated 07/10/19, Licensee informed Barry that, "I fell in love with a former client and did not wait 7 years to proceed with the relationship." Licensee admits that this was the first time that she disclosed this relationship to her supervisors. On 08/06/19, Barry filed a complaint with the Board. On 03/09/20, Licensee participated in an interview as part of the Board investigation. She was candid and acknowledged that, after the termination of counseling, she engaged in a sexual relationship with the client "beginning in August 2018."

Licensee read a statement to the Board and testified further on cross-examination. Licensee expressed that she is sorry and recognizes what she did was wrong. Licensee stated that this will certainly not happen again. On cross-examination, Licensee stated that she now knows that the period for not engaging in personal relationships with clients is five years, not seven years. Licensee says this person is the love of her life and she's not going to be meeting anyone else this way. Licensee did admit that she had been married previously and was separated from her previous spouse during the beginnings of her relationship with her new spouse. Licensee hopes to work under supervision and act with honesty and passion for her career going forward. On further cross-examination by the Board, Licensee clarified that her "coaching calls" were made from a blocked work phone and not from her personal phone. These calls were scheduled as counseling sessions, but were not billed to insurance as "counseling."

Licensee admitted that this was not a common practice, and was only done with this client under special circumstances.

In closing, Licensee admits that she did not wait the appropriate period of time, but that she and client did wait one year to begin an intimate relationship in August 2018 and then got married after that. Since Licensee resigned from Counseling Center, she has not engaged as a mental health counselor. Licensee's plan is to engage in mental health practice in VT some day. She is working for a local health center that wants to hire her and supervise her. Licensee wants to resolve this case and move forward when she is able to renew her license. Licensee plans to not renew her license in NH and simply apply to the licensing board in VT, with appropriate disclosures. Licensee argued that a two year suspension, retroactive to May 2018 is appropriate.

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

After reviewing all of the evidence, and taking into account the presentation and demeanor of all the witnesses, the Board finds, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the Licensee has committed professional misconduct. The central facts in this matter are clear. Licensee terminated her counseling relationship with the client and almost immediately pursued an intimate relationship with the same client. Licensee affirmatively states that she has been honest about her actions, but the Board finds that she was certainly not timely, even if her 07/10/19 disclosure was honest. The Board also questions the abrupt manner in which Licensee terminated client's therapy. In order to protect clients with DID, abrupt "therapeutic breaks" are not appropriate, due to the serious nature of the client's condition. Licensee's statements that the client was "doing better," that they discussed slowing down therapy, and only subsequently discussed their personal feelings are dubious at best. Licensee disclosed that there was no support whatsoever provided to the client surrounding the termination of services and this causes the Board great concern. The Board is concerned that Licensee was not honest with her supervisors about her personal feelings for the client and the Board is concerned that Licensee did not even consider speaking to a supervisor or another therapist in order to obtain guidance.

The Licensee is the professional in this situation. Even taking in account the compassionate "human" element and the lack of any demonstrated harm to the client in this case, the rules governing mental health professionals exist to prevent and deter potential harm to clients and the public. Licensee had many options and opportunities to extricate herself from this position in a timely and forthright

manner. Although it was likely difficult, Licensee should have taken affirmative steps to eschew an intimate relationship with the client. It is clear to the Board that Licensee pursued her intimate relationship with the client immediately after termination of counseling, going so far as to move in together after only a few months. As a result, 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 employed as a LCMHC at the Counseling Center in Nashua, New Hampshire.
- B. 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 an intimate relationship with a client immediately after terminating the client's counseling services in April 2017.
- C. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(II)(d), Licensee engaged in negligent or willful acts performed in a manner inconsistent with the health or safety of persons under the care of the licensee, specifically by abruptly terminating mental health services in April, 2017, without regard to the client's physical and emotional safety, in order to pursue in an intimate personal relationship with the client.
- D. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:36, Licensee engaged in professional misconduct in that she engaged in sexual relations with a client or former client.
- E. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(II)(i) and Rule 501.02(a)(3), Licensee engaged in other misconduct according to the ethical requirements applicable at the time, specifically by violating AMHCA Code of Ethics, Canon (I)(a)(4)(a) and (b), by engaging in an exploitative relationship with a client or former client.
- F. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III)(c), and upon a finding of professional misconduct under section (II) above, the Board orders that Licensee's license to practice be revoked.
- G. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III)(e) and Rules 505.02 and 505.05, and upon a finding of professional misconduct under section (II) above, the Board orders that Licensee shall pay an administrative fine in the amount of \$200.00 to the Board, payable within 60 days. Pursuant to Rule 505.04(c), this is the minimum possible fine based on her continuing course of misconduct.
- H. Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27(III)(e) and Rules 505.05(a), and upon a finding of professional misconduct under section (II) above, the Board elects *not* to subject Licensee to monetary sanctions or expenses related to enforcement due to the following factors: the severity of Licensee's misconduct; the extent to which Licensee did not dispute the evidence; the moderate nature/extent of the investigation and hearing; the Licensee's willingness to enter into a stipulation of fact as part of a reasonable settlement prior to hearing; the fact that sanctions will

likely not contribute to rehabilitation; the fact that fines were already imposed as stated above; and the lack of proof that assessment of expenses will deter Licensee or others from engaging in similar conduct.

- I. 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 practical lack of educational opportunities to address Licensee's misconduct and encourage the responsible practice of mental health; the serious and obvious nature of Licensee's misconduct; 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.
- J. 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; the lack of demonstrable physical or mental harm to the client; the strong *potential* to cause physical or mental harm to the client, due to her serious mental health needs such as DID and PTSD; the lack of any prior disciplinary record; and the intentional and non-inadvertent nature of the Licensee's misconduct.

**VI. CONCLUSION AND DECISION:**

Pursuant to RSA 330-A:27 and 29(V), the Board hereby REVOKES Isabel Senter's license as a LCMHC, and subjects her to further discipline as outlined above.

DATED: 01/04/21

\_\_\_\_\_/s/ Todd H. Prevett, Esq.\_\_\_\_\_  
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