

## association news

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## More alike than different

Social work regulators share concerns, wisdom

With 32 participants from jurisdictions as diverse as Alaska, Québec, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the

FROM SILOS TO BRIDGES:
Social Work Practice Mobility
Social Work Practice Mobility

Board

Member

Colloquium

Mediation

Problems

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Changes Since

Colloquium moderator Robert Payne of Idaho

first-ever ASWB **Board Member** Colloquium may have brought up more questions than it answered. Envisioned as a parallel to the Administrators Forum, the **Board Member** Colloquium met Thursday, April 30, prior to the start of the Spring Education Meeting in Seattle, Washington.

ASWB initiated the colloquium, said Director of Member Services

Jennifer Henkel, because "board members were searching for a way to connect with each other at our meetings, similar to the way administrators connect during the Administrators Forum. We wanted to give regulators the opportunity to build peer relationships and to learn from one another."

After all of the social work regulators present had introduced themselves, there were more than six flip chart sheets' worth of discussion topics. Issues on the table included active engagement of licensees, continuing education

audits, licensing and social work educators, and exemptions to licensing. Not surprisingly, the group also touched on the topic of practice mobility, with several individuals mentioning reciprocity, mobility, and telepractice in social work. In the U.S., states are facing budgetary cuts, and in Canada, provinces are wondering how to implement the social work licensing exams with the federal Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT). Some regulators find themselves caught between those advocating for the profession, legislators who are loathe to add to the "regulatory burden," and the very real need for public protection.

Following the initial round-robin introductions, moderators Tim Brown of Texas and Robert Payne of Idaho chose a few key issues to discuss during the remainder of the session. The conversation was frank and in-depth, allowing new regulators to learn from those with more experience. Brown and Payne, veteran regulators themselves, offered some structure to the afternoon session, taking into account the breadth and depth of experience in the room.

For instance, Payne called on Ken Middlebrooks, a longtime public member of the Minnesota Board of Social Work, to discuss how Minnesota went through the process of eliminating the licensing exemptions that remained on the books for so long. Middlebrooks was blunt: "Our first proposal was shot down by the legislature," he said. After a lot of conversation with stakeholders, Minnesota was able to repeal almost every exemption, said Middlebrooks: "In Minnesota, we've been talking about this for the last 15 years." It's taken that long to build the coalition necessary for such a big shift in the statute. That kind of perspective—a 15-year timescale and a

regulator who worked through the process—is invaluable for those with less exposure to such issues.

"It was a great first step," said Henkel of the first Board Member Colloquium. "It's a very organic process—there's still a lot of opportunity to grow this gathering in a way that meets the needs of our membership, especially as the role of the regulator evolves."

Being a regulator "has become more intrusive," said Payne. "Or

maybe I should say more inclusive—much more is expected of social work regulators. ... The days of just looking at applications and hearing disciplinary cases are gone," he said. Now regulators are engaging with the political process more and more. "But our three missions are still public protection, public protection, and public protection," said Payne.