



## Are we there yet?



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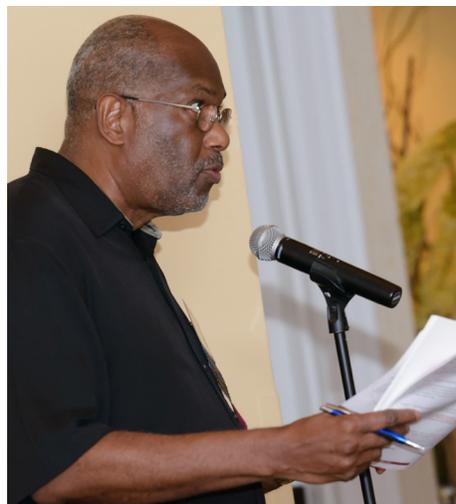
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The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) has evolved over the course of its 36-year existence. This evolution has resulted in a maturation of the association and has been inspiring to observe. I attended my first ASWB Annual Meeting in the early 1990s. The topics of that meeting were quite controversial, resulting in numerous disputes and disagreements from the delegates. Such evolutionary discord is to be expected, although sometimes it is hard to accept in the moment. At that time, ASWB experienced widespread opinions and debates related to governance structures, examination programs, uniformity, and states' rights.

### Counsel's Column

This evolutionary process helped strengthen ASWB by meaningfully involving members of member boards in the development and implementation of programs and services. These programs lessen burdens on governmental agencies to the benefit of consumer protection and the effectiveness and efficiencies of social work regulatory boards. This evolutionary process also enhanced ASWB membership trust in its leadership and solidified the governance structures in place, while continuing to emphasize and respect the autonomy of the member boards. ASWB member boards benefit from a realization and recognition of the commonalities of issues facing the social work regulatory community.

Incorporated in 1979, ASWB has experienced significant growth over its 36-year existence. Growth can be measured in many different ways that far exceed a limited focus on financial wherewithal. This growth has included development, implementation, and expansion of programs and services related to the licensure and renewal of licensure of social workers. To meet the continued needs of the member boards,



*Ken Middlebrooks (MN) has questions during the bylaws amendment voting.*



*Janice James (KY), an ASWB president during the 1990s, provides historical perspective during the bylaws discussion.*

ASWB staff has also expanded. Continued ASWB evolution and decision-making at the various association meetings involves informed attendees who engage in lively and respectful interactions. Never has such informed and calculated discussions and debate been more evident than at the ASWB Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly in November 2015, in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

The ASWB 2015 Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly included an ambitious agenda of task force meetings, orientation sessions for new attendees, and leadership training, along with the important business sessions related to the operation of the association. The delegates were provided with significant materials in advance of the meeting, and their dedication to preparedness was obvious. Prepared delegates and attendees resulted in stimulating and constructive debate contributing to an efficient and productive use of time.

In particular, the membership was faced with decisions addressing a complete overhaul of the bylaws. Bylaws are an essential link between the membership

and the operational aspects of the association. Through bylaws, the membership is empowered to participate in determining the governance structure, especially related to the number, qualifications, and terms of the Board of Directors. On behalf of the membership, the Board of Directors assists in setting policies in furtherance of the mission, vision, and values. These policies are carried out by ASWB staff.

The bylaws overhaul reflected a recognition of the growth of the association and involved both significant changes and a lengthy report to accurately portray the proposed modifications. The quality of the report and the preparedness of the delegates resulted in an efficient process to discuss and determine the fate of the suggested changes. The process was a pleasure to watch unfold. Regardless of the outcome of the votes, the pointed and constructive discussions reflected an informed delegate body. ASWB has matured to be an influential association that acts as a collective voice for regulation and reflects the wishes of its membership.

The electronic voting process further enhanced the efficiencies of the annual meeting. ASWB engaged in a process to allow for accurate and, when required, confidential voting with immediate results and storage in perpetuity. These electronic processes at the annual meetings parallel the evolution of practice modalities in virtually all regulated professions. Electronic and “tele” practice issues will challenge the regulatory community as the antiquated practice acts are enforced in these technologically advancing times.

Member boards are encouraged to continue to explore opportunities facilitated by membership and active participation in ASWB. Access to accurate and current information will be crucial to member boards facing sunset and legislative changes in a time of regulatory challenges. Stimulating these regulatory challenges are special interest groups promoting reduction, consolidation, or elimination of boards. The regulatory community, and social work boards in particular, will be challenged by mobility and portability issues related to technology in pursuit of an efficient licensure platform.

Member boards are encouraged to take advantage of ASWB programs and services designed to facilitate information exchange and promote uniformity among social work regulatory boards. The maturation of the association, increased communications, and enhanced trust of member boards will prove to be a valuable resource during these evolving and challenging times. Be proud of your work as regulators. Thank you for your service to public protection.