

How long does it take to resolve a complaint?

Complaints can take from two months to more than a year to resolve, but the majority of complaints are resolved within six months.

The time it takes to resolve a complaint varies greatly and depends on the complexity of the complaint, the severity of the complaint, the need for formal investigation, and the willingness of the licensee to work with the Board to resolve the complaint.

Does the Board send notification about the status of the complaint?

After receiving a complaint, the Board will send written confirmation to the person who submitted the complaint. In addition, notification regarding the status of a complaint is sent every 120 days and at the time of final resolution of a complaint. Questions about the status of a complaint may be directed to the Board.

What action can the Board take?

- Dismissal if the acts or conduct did not occur or if they do not violate the Social Work Practice Act
- Corrective Action such as remedial education
- Disciplinary Action such as practice conditions, including limitations and restrictions; suspension or revocation; administrative costs; and/or civil penalties

How does the Board decide what action to take?

The Board’s decisions are guided by how best to protect the public. Decisions are based on the severity of the violation, the level of evidence, the clarity of the law, and the Board’s determination of the licensee’s current ability and fitness to practice social work ethically and safely.

Is there more information about the Board’s complaint resolution process?

Complete information is available at the Board’s website and includes:

- Downloadable “Complaint Registration Form”
- “Board Action Search” provides public adverse action on licensees, applicants, and unlicensed persons
- View the “Compliance Process Video”



“To ensure to the residents of Minnesota quality social work services by establishing and enforcing professional standards.”



When can the Board of Social Work investigate a complaint?

The Board can investigate complaints against applicants for licensure; and persons holding active licenses; persons with expired, inactive, or no licenses if they are alleged to be practicing social work or representing themselves illegally.

The Board cannot investigate complaints against unlicensed social workers practicing in exempt settings and unlicensed persons who are not practicing social work or who are not illegally using social work credentials or titles. The Board has jurisdiction over individuals but has no jurisdiction over private or public social service agencies.

If the person is not under the Board's authority and a complaint cannot be investigated by the Board, there may be other agencies that can help.

How does someone verify if a person is licensed?

Go to the Board's website and use the "Search/Verify a License" feature on the home page. Search by name, license number, license type, city, or county.

What violates the law?

The complete text of the standards of practice and the complaint resolution process sections of the Social Work Practice Act are found in Minnesota Statutes, Sections 148E.185 to 148E.290, available at the Board's website.

Potential violations include:

- Unlicensed social work practice or use of a social work designation or title without being licensed
- Lack of competence, failure to consult or obtain supervision, or improper delegation of social work services
- Impairment by reason of chemical dependency, mental illness, or physical illness
- Discrimination or improper research practices
- Failure to maintain professional boundaries
- Improper relationship with a client or former client, including personal, business, or sexual relationship
- Failure to follow accepted social work practices, failure to maintain records, and improper termination of services
- Failure to maintain confidentiality

How does someone file a complaint?

Start with the Complaint Registration Form which can be downloaded from the Board's website or request one by telephone. Complete the form and attach a letter that states what the complaint is: what acts and conduct are alleged the social worker engaged in that violate the law and how. Be specific. Include dates on which the acts and conduct occurred; identify the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of witnesses. Include copies of relevant documents.

Does the licensee know who filed the complaint?

No. The identity of persons filing complaints is confidential data under Minnesota law.

How does the Board investigate complaints?

In most cases, the Board will contact the licensee in writing and ask for a written response to the complaint. In some cases, the Board will ask the Attorney General to conduct the investigation, either initially or after getting the licensee's written response. The written response and the Attorney General's investigative report are reviewed by the Board's Compliance Committee, which is comprised of Board Members.

The Committee can dismiss the complaint if the facts do not support a violation of the law; or the Committee can decide to meet with the licensee, formally or informally, to learn more or attempt to resolve the complaint. If the Committee decides that the licensee violated the law, the Committee can propose corrective or disciplinary action. If corrective or disciplinary action is recommended by the Committee, the full Board must review and take action on the case. Corrective and disciplinary action is public information under Minnesota law.

If the licensee does not agree to a voluntary settlement, the Committee can attempt to resolve the complaint by using alternative dispute resolution or by holding a contested case hearing before a state administrative law judge.