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BEFORE THE ARIZONA BOARD

OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EXAMINERS

In the Matter of:

Vincent J. Ruzzo, LPC-18481, Licensed Professional Counselor, In the State of Arizona.

RESPONDENT

CASE NO. 2023-0048

CONSENT AGREEMENT

In the interest of a prompt and speedy settlement of the above captioned matter, consistent with the public interest, statutory requirements and responsibilities of the Arizona State Board of Behavioral Health Examiners ("Board"), and pursuant to A.R.S. §§ 32-3281(F) and 41-1092.07(F)(5), Vincent J. Ruzzo ("Respondent") and the Board enter into this Consent Agreement, Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order ("Consent Agreement") as a final disposition of this matter.

RECITALS

Respondent understands and agrees that:

- Any record prepared in this matter, all investigative materials prepared or received by the Board concerning the allegations, and all related materials and exhibits may be retained in the Board's file pertaining to this matter.
- 2. Respondent has the right to a formal administrative hearing at which Respondent can present evidence and cross examine the State's witnesses. Respondent hereby irrevocably waives their right to such formal hearing concerning these allegations and irrevocably waives their right to any rehearing or judicial review relating to the allegations contained in this Consent Agreement.
- Respondent has the right to consult with an attorney prior to entering into this Consent Agreement.

- 4. Respondent acknowledges and agrees that upon signing this Consent Agreement and returning it to the Board's Executive Director, Respondent may not revoke their acceptance of this Consent Agreement or make any modifications to it. Any modification of this original document is ineffective and void unless mutually approved by the parties in writing.
- 5. The findings contained in the Findings of Fact portion of this Consent Agreement are conclusive evidence of the facts stated herein between only Respondent and the Board for the final disposition of this matter and may be used for purposes of determining sanctions in any future disciplinary matter.
- 6. This Consent Agreement is subject to the Board's approval, and will be effective only when the Board accepts it. In the event the Board in its discretion does not approve this Consent Agreement, this Consent Agreement is withdrawn and shall be of no evidentiary value, nor shall it be relied upon or introduced in any disciplinary action by any party hereto, except that Respondent agrees that should the Board reject this Consent Agreement and this case proceeds to hearing, Respondent shall assert no claim that the Board was prejudiced by its review and discussion of this document or of any records relating thereto.
- 7. Respondent acknowledges and agrees that the acceptance of this Consent Agreement is solely to settle this Board matter and does not preclude the Board from instituting other proceedings as may be appropriate now or in the future. Furthermore, and notwithstanding any language in this Consent Agreement, this Consent Agreement does not preclude in any way any other state agency or officer or political subdivision of this state from instituting proceedings, investigating claims, or taking legal action as may be appropriate now or in the future relating to this matter or other matters concerning Respondent, including but not limited to violations of Arizona's Consumer Fraud Act. Respondent acknowledges that, other than with respect to the Board, this Consent Agreement makes no representations, implied or

otherwise, about the views or intended actions of any other state agency or officer or political subdivision of the state relating to this matter or other matters concerning Respondent.

- 8. Respondent understands that once the Board approves and signs this Consent Agreement, it is a public record that may be publicly disseminated as a formal action of the Board, and that it shall be reported as required by law to the National Practitioner Data Bank.
- 9. Respondent further understands that any violation of this Consent Agreement constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to A.R.S. § 32-3251(16)(n) and may result in disciplinary action pursuant to A.R.S. § 32-3281.
- 10. The Board therefore retains jurisdiction over Respondent and may initiate disciplinary action against Respondent if it determines that they have failed to comply with the terms of this Consent Agreement or of the practice act.

The Board issues the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order:

FINDINGS OF FACT

- Respondent is the holder of License No. LPC-18481 for the practice of counseling in the State of Arizona.
- 2. From 06/16/22 10/07/22, Respondent was employed at Agency as the Clinical Director.
- 3. On 10/04/22, the Board received a complaint against Respondent alleging unprofessional conduct in the workplace among coworkers and colleagues.
- 4. From 08/21/22 09/19/22, Respondent sent the following texts to Complainant and other Agency employees:
 - a. On one day Respondent sent 4 texts in which Complainant did not respond for a period.
 - b. Once Complainant responded, Respondent texted if Complainant felt like responding to any of his other texts.

- c. Respondent assumed Complainant was drinking or she would not get smart with him.
- d. Respondent needed to know exactly what was going on with Complainant so he can determinate whether to approve PTO.
- e. "What? 'We need you?' It means we need you for discussions."
- f. After Complainant texted that she had a migraine Respondent responded stating there was plenty of other men who would enjoy her company.
- g. After Coworker texted she would be late Respondent responded "Arrested again?"
- h. "Jesus, [Coworker] WTF?"
- 5. On 09/30/22, Complainant and Therapist emailed HR their concerns regarding Respondent conduct and comments including these comments made through text messages.
- 6. On 10/06/22, Agency conducted interviews with staff members which included the following in part:
 - a. Therapist reported the following:
 - Respondent has made comments referencing other staff as idiots who do not know how to do their jobs.
 - Respondent called an employee a bitch multiple times in front of the clinical team.
 - Respondent has made off-hand comments in group chats.
 - b. A separate coworker reported the following:
 - Respondent sent a text about Complainant being drunk.
 - Respondent changed Complainant's responsibilities, chastised her for not doing her job, and raised his voice at Complainant.

- Respondent has stood in front of the door like he was trying to intimidate her.
- c. Coworker reported the following:
 - Coworker recalls two tests that did not affect her but after her peers reached out she realized they were inappropriate.
 - Respondent knew Coworker's history and being that Respondent had years of sobriety, they had a connection.
 - Coworker was bothered that the text about being arrested was made within the group chat.
 - Respondent would say meetings would end when he says and it made it seem Respondent did not respect others' time.
- 7. On 10/07/22, Respondent was involuntarily terminated from Agency and when Board staff contacted Agency's HR Director, she noted that Respondent's termination was regarding professional boundary concerns.
- 8. Additionally, from 07/20 05/22, Respondent was employed with Blueprints for Recovery where there was an undated letter within his personnel records indicating Respondent had made inappropriate comments to an intern.
- 9. On 12/11/22, following notice of this Board complaint, Respondent texted Coworker the following:
 - Respondent has been admonished from contact with certain people, including Coworker.
 - b. At the 01/13/23 Board meeting, the Board is likely going to dismiss this complaint without consequences of any kind.
 - c. It is around this time the Board will also likely revoke Complainant's license.

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- 10. Respondent represented the following during an investigative interview with Board staff:
 - a. Respondent texted Complainant that he assumed she was drinking because the way she was texting surprised him and Complainant would never talk to Respondent like that.
 - b. Respondent would not have texted the CEO like this.
 - c. Respondent texted in this manner because that was the way he and the clinical team usually talked.
 - d. Respondent commented about men enjoying Complainant's company because she made comments before about a boyfriend causing migraines for her, and he was trying to be funny.
 - e. Respondent accidentally texted the group chat about Coworker being arrested and meant to only text it individually to Coworker.
 - f. Respondent texted WTF out of frustration and never uses that type of terminology, but agrees a text like that would not be professional.
 - g. Respondent does not recall sending the 12/11/22 text to Coworker because he was very ill around that time.
 - h. Respondent has no clue why he would state that his case was going to be dismissed and Complainant's license was going to be revoked.
- 11. Respondent represented he would not send texts like this to the CEO, but felt it was appropriate to text colleagues and subordinates in such a manner.
- 12. Respondent sent Coworker a text message implying that his complaint would be dismissed and the Board would revoke Complainant's license without any sort of notification from the Board that this was the case.

- 13. Rather than setting appropriate and professional boundaries as an LPC and Clinical Director, Respondent engaged in inappropriate texting with multiple staff he was supervising.
- 14. As a supervisor, Respondent in fact should have established and role modeled professional boundaries and communication with his staff.
- 15. At the 01/13/23 Board meeting, based on a thorough review of the Board's investigation, the members unanimously voted to find Respondent in violation of unprofessional conduct and ordered Respondent to complete a comprehensive psychological evaluation based on the concerns noted in Board staff's investigation
- 16. At the 09/15/23 Board meeting, the Board members reviewed the results of the comprehensive psychological evaluation which provided the following recommendations:
 - Respondent should abstain from positions which require clinical supervision of others, including students and staff.
 - b. Respondent should participate in ongoing supervision for six months to ensure he is maintaining professional standards and conduct.
 - c. Respondent should comply with all of the requests and recommendations made by the Board.
- 17. The Board members subsequently utilized this psychological evaluation as a tool when determining the degree of action to take.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Board has jurisdiction over Respondent pursuant to A.R.S. § 32-3251 et seq.
and the rules promulgated by the Board relating to Respondent's professional practice as a
licensed behavioral health professional.

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2. The conduct and circumstances described in the Findings of Fact constitute a violation of A.R.S. § 32-3251(16)(k), engaging in any conduct or practice that is contrary to recognized standards of ethics in the behavioral health profession or that constitutes a danger to the health, welfare or safety of a client, as it relates to the ACA Code of Ethics:

F.3.a. Extending Conventional Supervisory Relationships

Counseling supervisors clearly define and maintain ethical professional. personal, and social relationships with their supervisees. Supervisors consider the risks and benefits of extending current supervisory relationships in any form beyond conventional parameters. In extending these boundaries, supervisors take appropriate professional precautions to ensure that judgment is not impaired and that no harm occurs.

ORDER

Based upon the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the parties agree to the provisions and penalties imposed as follows:

Stayed Suspension

- 1. As of the effective date of this Consent Agreement, Respondent's license, LPC-18481, shall be SUSPENDED for 5 years. However, the suspension shall be stayed and Respondent's license shall be placed on probation.
- 2. During the stayed suspension portion of the Order, if Respondent is noncompliant with the terms of the Order in any way, the stay of the suspension shall be lifted and Respondent's license shall be automatically suspended as set forth above.
- 3. If Respondent contests the lifting of the stay as it relates to this paragraph, Respondent shall request in writing, within 10 days of being notified of the automatic suspension of licensure, that the matter be placed on the Board agenda for the Board to review

and determine if the automatic suspension of Respondent's license was supported by clear and convincing evidence.

- 4. If the written request is received within 10 days of a regularly scheduled Board meeting, the request will not be heard at that meeting, but will be heard at the next regularly scheduled Board meeting.
- 5. Pending the Board's review, Respondent's license shall be reported as suspended under review. Respondent may not work in any capacity as a licensed behavioral health professional pending the Board's review. The Board's decision and Order shall not be subject to further review.
- Respondent's license, LPC-18481, will be placed on probation for 5 years,
 effective from the date of entry as signed below.
- 7. Respondent shall not practice under their license, LPC-18481, unless they are fully compliant with all terms and conditions in this Consent Agreement. If, for any reason, Respondent is unable to comply with the terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement, they shall immediately notify the Board in writing and shall not practice under their license until they submit a written request to the Board to re-commence compliance with this Consent Agreement. All such requests shall be pre-approved by the Board Chair or designee.
- 8. In the event that Respondent is unable to comply with the terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement, all remaining time frames shall be tolled and remain tolled until such time as they are granted approval to re-commence compliance with the Consent Agreement.

Practice Restriction

While on probation, if Respondent engages in the practice of behavioral health, they shall not participate in private practice. While on probation, Respondent shall not supervise any

students, interns, staff, and licensed professionals. A quarterly report attesting to this stipulation shall be submitted by the employer.

Continuing Education

10. In addition to the continuing education requirements of A.R.S. § 32-3273, within 12 months of the effective date of this Consent Agreement, Respondent shall complete 10 clock hours of continuing education addressing sexual harassment and professional relationships with coworkers. All required continuing education shall be pre-approved by the Board Chair or designee. Upon completion, Respondent shall submit a certificate of completion of the required continuing education.

Clinical Supervision

11. While on probation, Respondent shall submit to clinical supervision for 24 months by a masters or higher level behavioral health professional licensed by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners at the independent level. Within 30 days of the date of this Consent Agreement, Respondent shall submit the name of a clinical supervisor for pre-approval by the Board Chair or designee. Also within 30 days of the date of this Consent Agreement, the clinical supervisor shall submit a letter disclosing their prior relationship to Respondent. In that letter, the clinical supervisor must address why they should be approved, acknowledge that they have reviewed the Consent Agreement and include the results of an initial assessment and a supervision plan regarding the proposed supervision of Respondent. The letter from the supervisor shall be submitted to the Board.

Focus and Frequency of Clinical Supervision

12. The focus of the supervision shall relate to boundaries, power differential with clients and coworkers, and professionalism with coworkers. Respondent shall meet individually with the supervisor for a minimum of one hour weekly for the first six months, then biweekly for

the next six months, and the frequency for the remaining time will be at the recommendation of the clinical supervisor but not less than monthly for the remaining 12 months.

Reports

- 13. Once approved, the supervisor shall submit quarterly reports for review and approval by the Board Chair or designee. The quarterly reports shall include issues presented in this Consent Agreement that need to be reported and the supervisor shall notify the Board if more frequent supervision is needed. Quarterly reports shall include the following:
 - a. Dates of each clinical supervision session.
 - A comprehensive description of issues discussed during supervision sessions.
- 14. All quarterly supervision reports shall include a copy of clinical supervision documentation maintained for that quarter. All clinical supervision documentation maintained by the supervisor shall comply with requirements set forth in A.A.C. R4-6-212(C).
- 15. After Respondent's probationary period, the supervisor shall submit a final summary report for review and approval by the Board Chair or designee. The final report shall also contain a recommendation as to whether the Respondent should be released from this Consent Agreement.

Change of Clinical Supervisor During Probation

15. If, during the period of Respondent's probation, the clinical supervisor determines that they cannot continue as the clinical supervisor, they shall notify the Board within 10 days of the end of supervision and provide the Board with an interim final report. Respondent shall advise the Board Chair or designee within 30 days of cessation of clinical supervision by the approved clinical supervisor and provide the name of a new proposed clinical supervisor. The proposed clinical supervisor shall provide the same documentation to the Board as was required of the initial clinical supervisor.

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Therapy

- 17. During the period of probation, Respondent shall attend therapy for 24 months with a masters or higher level behavioral health professional licensed at the independent level. Within 30 days of the date of this Consent Agreement, Respondent shall submit the name of their therapist and the therapist's curriculum vitae for pre-approval by the Board Chair or designee. Also within 30 days of the date of this Consent Agreement, the therapist shall submit a letter addressing why they should be approved, acknowledging that they have reviewed the Consent Agreement and include the results of an initial assessment and a treatment plan regarding the proposed treatment of Respondent.
- 18. Upon approval, the Board will provide the therapist with copies of any required evaluations completed at the request of the Board prior to this Consent Agreement and the Board's investigative report.

Focus and Frequency of Therapy

19. The focus of the therapy shall relate to information provided in the investigative report and psychological evaluation, and behavioral interactions with others. Respondent shall meet with the therapist monthly and early release is available upon the recommendation of the therapist.

Reports

20. Once approved, the therapist shall submit quarterly reports and a final summary report to the Board for review and approval. The quarterly reports shall include issues presented in this Consent Agreement that need to be reported and the therapist shall notify the Board if more frequent therapy is needed. The reports shall address Respondent's current mental health status, medications prescribed, if any, treatment recommendation, and shall report if, in their professional opinion, Respondent becomes unable to practice psychotherapy safely and

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competently. The final report shall also contain a recommendation as to whether the Respondent should be released from this Consent Agreement.

Change of Therapist

21. In the event that, during the period of Respondent's probation, Respondent's Board-approved therapist discontinues treatment, Respondent shall submit the name of a new therapist and the therapist's curriculum vitae for pre-approval by the Board Chair or designed within 30 days of the discontinued treatment. Also within 30 days of the date of the discontinued treatment, the proposed therapist shall submit a letter addressing why they should be approved, acknowledging that they have reviewed the Consent Agreement, and include the results of an initial assessment and a treatment plan regarding the proposed treatment of Respondent.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Provision of Clinical Supervision

22. Respondent shall not provide clinical supervision to associate level licensees accruing and submitting hours towards independent licensure while subject to this Consent Agreement.

Civil Penalty

- 23. Subject to the provisions set forth in paragraph 24, the Board imposes a civil penalty against the Respondent in the amount of \$1,000.00.
- 24. Respondent's payment of the civil penalty shall be stayed so long as Respondent remains compliant with the terms of this Consent Agreement. If Board staff determines that Respondent is noncompliant with the terms of this Consent Agreement in any respect, with the exception of the tolling provision under paragraph 3, the stay of the civil penalty payment shall be automatically lifted and payment of the civil penalty shall be made by certified check of money order payable to the Board within 30 days after being notified in writing of the lifting of the stay.

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that the matter be reviewed by the Board for the limited purpose of determining whether the automatic lifting of the stay was supported by clear and convincing evidence. If the Board receives the written request within 10 days or less of the next regularly scheduled Board

Within 10 days of being notified of the lifting of the stay, Respondent may request

- meeting, the request will not be heard at that meeting, but will be heard at the next regularly scheduled Board meeting. The Board's decision on this matter shall not be subject to further
- review.
- 26. The Board reserves the right to take further disciplinary action against Respondent for noncompliance with this Consent Agreement after affording Respondent notice and an opportunity to be heard. If a complaint is filed against Respondent for failure to comply with this Consent Agreement, the Board shall have continuing jurisdiction until the matter is final and the period of probation shall be extended until the matter is final.
- 27. If Respondent currently sees clients in their own private practice, and obtains any other type of behavioral health position, either as an employee or independent contractor, where they provide behavioral health services to clients of another individual or agency, they shall comply with requirements set forth in paragraphs 28 through 30 below.
- 28. Within 10 days of the effective date of this Order, if Respondent is working in a position where Respondent provides any type of behavioral health related services or works in a setting where any type of behavioral health, health care, or social services are provided, Respondent shall provide the Board Chair or designee with a signed statement from Respondent's employer(s) confirming Respondent provided the employer(s) with a copy of this Consent Agreement. If Respondent does not provide the employer's statement to the Board within 10 days of the effective date, the Board will provide Respondent's employer(s) with a copy of the Consent Agreement.

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29. If Respondent is not employed as of the effective date of this Order, within 10 days of accepting employment in a position where Respondent provides any type of behavioral health related services or in a setting where any type of behavioral health, health care, or social services are provided, Respondent shall provide the Board Chair or designee with a written statement providing the contact information of their new employer and a signed statement from Respondent's new employer confirming Respondent provided the employer with a copy of this Consent Agreement. If Respondent does not provide the employer's statement to the Board within 10 days, as required, Respondent's failure to provide the required statement to the Board shall be deemed a violation of A.R.S. § 32-3251(16)(n) and the Board will provide Respondent's employer(s) with a copy of the Consent Agreement.

30. If, during the period of Respondent's probation, Respondent changes employment, resigns, is involuntarily terminated, resigns in lieu of termination, or goes on extended leave of absence for whatever reason that may impact their ability to timely comply with the terms of probation, Respondent shall, within 10 days of the aforementioned acts, inform the Board of their change of employment status. After the change and within 10 days of accepting employment in a position where Respondent provides any type of behavioral health related services or in a setting where any type of behavioral health, health care, or social services are provided, Respondent shall provide the Board Chair or designee a written statement providing the contact information of their new employer(s) and a signed statement from Respondent's new employer(s) confirming Respondent provided the employer(s) with a copy of this Consent Agreement. If Respondent does not provide the employer's statement to the Board within 10 days, as required, Respondent's failure to provide the required statement to the Board shall be deemed a violation of A.R.S. § 32-3251(16)(n) and the Board will provide Respondent's employer(s) with a copy of the Consent Agreement.

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- 31. Respondent shall practice behavioral health using the name under which they are licensed. If Respondent changes their name, they shall advise the Board of the name change as prescribed under the Board's regulations and rules.
- 32. Prior to the release of Respondent from probation, Respondent must submit a written request to the Board for release from the terms of this Consent Agreement at least 30 days prior to the date they would like to have this matter appear before the Board. Respondent may appear before the Board, either in person or telephonically. Respondent must provide evidence that they have successfully satisfied all terms and conditions in this Consent Agreement. The Board has the sole discretion to determine whether all terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement have been met and whether Respondent has adequately demonstrated that they have addressed the issues contained in this Consent Agreement. In the event that the Board determines that any or all terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement have not been met, the Board may conduct such further proceedings as it determines are appropriate to address those matters.
- 33. Respondent shall bear all costs relating to probation terms required in this Consent Agreement.
- 34. Respondent shall be responsible for ensuring that all documentation required in this Consent Agreement is provided to the Board in a timely manner.
 - 35. This Consent Agreement shall be effective on the date of entry below.
- 36. This Consent Agreement is conclusive evidence of the matters described herein and may be considered by the Board in determining appropriate sanctions in the event a subsequent violation occurs.

1 PROFESSIONAL ACCEPTS, SIGNS AND DATES THIS CONSENT AGREEMENT 2 Dr. Vincent 1. Ruzzo Sep 20, 2023 Vincent J. Ruzzo Date 3 4 **BOARD ACCEPTS, SIGNS AND DATES THIS CONSENT AGREEMENT** 5 Sep 20, 2023 By: 6 TOBI ZAVALA, Executive Director Date Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners 7 8 **ORIGINAL** of the foregoing filed Sep 20, 2023 9 with: 10 Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners 1740 West Adams Street, Suite 3600 11 Phoenix, AZ 85007 12 **EXECUTED COPY** of the foregoing sent electronically Sep 20, 2023 13 Mona Baskin 14 **Assistant Attorney General** 2005 North Central Avenue 15 Phoenix, AZ 85004 16 Vincent J. Ruzzo Address of Record 17 Respondent 18 Josh Butner Musgrove Drutz Kack & Gautreaux, PC 19 1135 W. Iron Springs Rd. Prescott, AZ 86305 20 Attorney for Respondent 21 22 23 24