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# Millennial Questions Due Process in VI, Contemplates Leaving Territory After Social Work License is Denied

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Kwane Barthlett says he has a passion for seeing people thrive. That's what led the 28-year-old to leave a career in the law enforcement field and transition into the mental health space.

"It made so much sense to me when I got into mental health that this affects every single aspect of our society," Barthlett said in an interview with the Consortium Thursday. "Looking at the mentality and motivations for folks, from our crime rate to our issues when it comes to advertising... it made so much sense to me to just get into this field and just stay in this field because I like to see people thriving."

It was this same passion that Barthlett says propelled him to attain his bachelor of arts in forensic psychology in November, 2021 from the Southern New Hampshire University. He is currently

enrolled at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology pursuing a master's degree in forensic psychology and continues to undertake his studies online as this was one of the changes that came with the global pandemic.

Having attained the educational requirements and with years of experience under his belt, most notably with the Department of Health, Barthlett applied for a social worker license through the Social Work Board.

On October 13, 2022, Bartlett was issued a letter with notice of the board's preliminary determination which specified the board's intent to deny his application which was filed on September 6, 2022. The board's rationale was that "the level of licensure requested cannot be used to operate a business." The board noted that further discussion was necessary to "address services provided and nature of the business under your current business license 1-56355-1L issued by DLCA."

The letter also noted that the board would be providing the applicant, Barthlett, with an opportunity to respond to its preliminary determination and to "present evidence that you meet the statutory requirements to be granted the license."

According to [Virgin Islands Code, Title 27](#), at minimum a master's degree is needed for the field of work Barthlett seeks.

In the October 13th letter, Barthlett was given until November 5 to respond to the board's concerns. It was also noted that he would be given an opportunity to address the board at an informal conference at the board's next meeting.

That meeting happened on Thursday.

Ahead of the meeting, Barthlett responded to the board's concerns in a letter. He wrote, "No one, specifically, I the applicant, never informed the board that I planned to operate a business with this social work license. I was offered two separate social worker jobs based solely on my character, the strength of my resume, and my work history. The offering entities were fully aware that I had no social work license but still sought me out and encouraged me to apply due to statutory requirements and in order to bill clients per insurance policies."

He added, "... no statute or subsection of the V.I. Code supports their claim that business cannot be conducted under the level of licensure applied for (Licensed Social Worker)."

In his letter, Barthlett chastised the board, saying he could "provide names of previous victims of this board's and other professional licensing boards' monopolization relative to this matter, under oath."

When he presented to the board again on Thursday, this time in a private session, the board was unmoved.

"Their decision was that my qualifications combined with my three and a half years of experience with the Department of Health, Division of Behavioral Health, all my diplomas, certifications, trainings, that I am only qualified, according to them, for entry-level as a licensed social work associate. That would mean that I would still have to be supervised by a licensed social worker. I don't agree, but that's the board's decision."

"I'm known for my work," Barthlett added. "I'm one of the few males working in behavioral health in our territory. I'm young... I take an interest in these things because I don't see much of my age group, my millennials, really reaching out and getting into these fields because again, we're a group of people who value our peace. We value our mental health. This field, trying to get licensed... trying to get into a practice, trying to establish yourself, it challenges your peace."

In our interview, Barthlett addressed societal issues in the territory and contextualized them in terms of mental health.

"If you look at our territory, you look at the arrests that are being made, you look at the crimes that are being committed, the rapes, murders, homicides, the gun violence, the mental health situations that are out there, it's majority men who are affected," he said. "Those are the arrestees, the perpetrators, the suspects, the individuals who are requiring help. We have a shortage of men in this field, specifically black men. Young black men. Young black men are who we are seeing being arrested and who are being told that these are the individuals who are the bad ones in our community. In reality, there are so many of us out there who have the passion that I have, who want to make a difference to serve, but the red tape you have to go through just to get a license, just to get respect first and foremost, it's very difficult. It is very challenging and it kind of puts you in a position where you have to choose between your peace and your passion."

Though Barthlett said he'd "have to sleep on it," he admitted that he was now "leaning in the direction of choosing my peace over my passion."

"There's a number of individuals, not just with the Social Work Board, but the Counseling Board, the Board of Psychological Examiners... there's so many people who have that passion, who have that drive, who are local, born and raised, educated, experienced, but there is this bit of a monopoly on the social work, the mental health, the psychology field, whereas, if you're not in that circle, if you're not someone that would acquiesce to the powers that be, it is very hard for you to get things done. People end up leaving, going over to Tortola, going back to the mainland where they got their degrees."

The whole ordeal has left Barthlett contemplating leaving the U.S. Virgin Islands for greener pastures.

"Opportunities are vast and just greater elsewhere than in our islands," he said.