Dear Members,

Recently, ASPPB has been approached by a number of individuals with concerns related to the Examination of Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP). Specifically, these concerns have been associated with safe access to EPPP test centers during COVID-19, remote access to the EPPP, and concerns regarding the validity of the EPPP. ASPPB takes each of these concerns seriously.

In an effort to keep you informed and to assist you should these same concerns come before you, please take a minute to review the information below which has been developed to provide clarity on the activities underway at ASPPB regarding both our concern for testing candidates during a public health crisis and our commitment to providing an equitable and valid examination to assist you our members in your work to safeguard the public and the public trust.

Thank you and please take care,

Mariann Burnett-Atwell, PsyD
Chief Executive Officer, ASPPB

Concerns with Taking the EPPP During the Presence of a Public Health Crisis

First and most broadly, all decisions made by ASPPB in this arena are guided by a twofold mandate: to balance the health and safety of individuals sitting for the EPPP with the health and safety of those in the public who ultimately depend on psychologists meeting our profession’s criteria for competency.

ASPPB has worked with its testing center vendor (Pearson) to expand the range of available testing times for EPPP candidates. This has included classifying our candidates as “essential providers” so they could take the exam when candidates for other exams may not have been allowed. In addition, Pearson agreed to increase hours and days of operations, sometimes maintaining center availability from 6 AM-11PM. We have also added third-party centers that have met our vital security standards and are capable of delivering the Exam on a Pearson platform. In addition, we have eliminated the 90-day window for registration to allow candidates to schedule far in advance, as well as eliminated the reschedule and cancelation fees (except within 24 hours’ notice). While a few areas have limited availability, most areas have been able to provide time slots within reasonable time frames. We continue to monitor test center availability but if an individual is experiencing difficulties with scheduling, please contact ASPPB at (678) 216-1175 and our staff should be able to assist.

Due to COVID-19, ASPPB recognizes that many exam candidates may wish to avoid test centers. Given the evolving nature and guidance on the pandemic, much discussion has already gone into how ASPPB can address this concern and those discussions will continue. Pearson centers, for example, have implemented a number of measures to reduce risk that are based on CDC guidelines, including adding additional sanitization and proper distancing. If a candidate finds that a test center is not following proper protocols, we encourage them to contact ASPPB; in fact, should a candidate find something problematic at a test center that warrants not taking the Exam, we would ask that they not begin the Exam, file an incident report, and we will work with them on setting another administration date at a different center.

Remote Access to the EPPP

ASPPB has explored this possibility and conferred extensively with technology experts and other licensing examination groups; however, technological equity concerns and security considerations remain highly persuasive deterrents in moving the test online as both factors are paramount to our public protection mandate.

Such examples include: Technology experts have discouraged providing an examination the length of the EPPP online due to the required bandwidth and connectivity. In 2020, the Canadian medical boards attempted this model, but a large portion of their candidates experienced technical issues; as a result, remote access to their
exam was halted. Additionally, online proctoring has produced security issues that have resulted in the loss of entire examination forms. All exam programs, including the EPPP, have had incidents of attempted item theft. These items can then be delivered to listservs or select groups, thus allowing access to exact exam content. Obviously, the illegal release of items impacts the validity of the Exam. While many candidates may not be aware of the security considerations that go into administering a high stakes exam such as the EPPP — and most candidates would never consider doing something this unethical — we have unfortunately had EPPP candidates engage in attempted item theft and distribution. Security and technological considerations are therefore instrumental in generating a valid assessment of candidate knowledge or skill, which is also why, at this time, ASPPB has not moved to offer online delivery of the EPPP. That said, ASPPB will continue to monitor developments to determine if an online format could be securely delivered for our candidates and preserve the integrity of the process for the best interests of the public.

**Concerns Related to the Validity of the EPPP**

The ASPPB Examination Program is committed to providing valid, reliable, scientifically based and fair assessments of candidates seeking licensure. ASPPB firmly believes that the EPPP ultimately supports the mandate of licensing bodies to assess the foundational knowledge and skills of potential applicants and, by those assessments, to protect the public and ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the profession to that same constituency.

As part of that commitment, we continue our focus on developing the rigor, objectivity, and validity of the exam itself. Guiding that focus is our adherence to standards set by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. But ASPPB, in harnessing the highly regarded and in-depth test expertise of our profession, as well as employing test development methods intended to reduce potential bias, also goes beyond these standards. One can find a detailed explanation of the development process in our FAQs on the ASPPB website (www.asppb.net).

It is important to highlight elements of our process here: First, hundreds of subject matter experts who are practicing psychologists volunteer their time to collaborate on the ongoing development of the EPPP. These individuals intentionally represent a diversity of racial, ethnic, geographic, gender, and practice characteristics. The training for writing items for the EPPP involves, among other things, consideration of cultural and linguistic issues. Each draft item is reviewed by members of the Item Development Committee, which is comprised of a group of content experts who together cover each domain area. Each potential exam item is reviewed for accuracy, clarity of language, potential bias, and relevance for entry-level practice. If the item meets all relevance and quality standards, it is approved for the Examination Committee to review for possible pretesting on an exam.

The Examination Committee itself is further comprised of psychologists who represent various demographics, specialty areas, and expertise in each of the domain areas assessed on the Examination. The Examination Committee reviews each new item and must reach consensus on the item’s relevance and quality before it is pretested on a form of the Examination. Taken together, these reviews help ensure accuracy, and the Examination Committee review provides another layer of oversight regarding fairness and relevance.

All items are then statistically evaluated through pretesting before they are used as operational (scored) items on an exam. When an item is being pretested, that item appears on the Examination, but does not count toward the candidate’s exam score. An item is approved for use as a scored item only if its statistical performance is acceptable based on Item Response Theory criteria and it is shown to be a consistent, valid, and fair measure of the test taker’s knowledge (or applied skills) in a particular domain. After pretesting, items that meet established statistical criteria are once again reviewed by the Examination Committee before being placed on an exam as an operational item.

ASPPB is always seeking refinements and improvements to this process, which is why, consistent with ongoing efforts to provide a fair assessment of candidates’ knowledge and skills, ASPPB is incorporating an additional layer of review for items on the EPPP that, by statistical analysis, appear to be answered differentially across certain groups. Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis allows for these identified items to then be reviewed by a panel.
of experts in cultural competence to determine if there is content in that item that is biased toward any particular group. If that is found to be the case, an item will be removed from the bank of items available for use on the exam, sent back for modification or rewriting, and then pretested again.

Through this multi-phase, iterative, and meticulous assessment development process, ASPPB holds as a priority a commitment to create an exam that is a standardized, objective, reliable, and valid measure of the knowledge and applied skills needed for the entry-level psychologist.