

January 23,2024

RE: LD 1990: “An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement” – Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross

Good afternoon Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee.

I am a School Social Worker in the Portland Public Schools. I have been privileged to work in this diverse and vibrant school community for the last twenty years. As a social work department, we have been working to find ways to increasingly employ social workers in our district who represent our student body, the most ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse student body in the state of Maine.

There are many ways in which the pipeline to graduate level social work disadvantages prospective colleagues, especially BIPOC and multilingual colleagues, from obtaining work in the field. To address some of these inequities, we have worked with university social work departments to encourage our own high school students to consider a career path in social work. We have prioritized the provision of internship opportunities for bilingual and BIPOC graduate students. We are now advocating for LD1990 to put a moratorium on examination requirements for Bachelor’s (BSWs) and Master’s level social workers (MSWs) who have graduated from an accredited school of social work and will support more appropriately trained social workers to come into the field at the LSW, LMSW, and LMSW-CC level of licensure.

Standardized testing has been well documented to unfairly disadvantage BIPOC and multilingual learners. Since the pandemic, we have seen many universities forgo requirements for standardized tests like the SAT and ACT, and universities still attract qualified candidates who can be successful. Licensure exams for entry level social work positions also disadvantage some of the very candidates we most need in our ranks to support our students and their families. There are safeguards in place with licensed supervision to support these colleagues. This type of supervision is more supportive and effective than an exam. Students are asking for social work support both at school and in the community who can speak their home language and who have similar cultural backgrounds and understandings.

I have students on months long waitlists for counseling support. With the serious uptick in need, particularly since the pandemic, Maine needs to find ways to increase access to mental health professionals. There are educated professionals in the position who are qualified to help but have struggled to pass the standardized testing. With support, these professionals could assist in addressing the dire need for increased mental health support.

I support the moratorium on licensure requirements as stated in LD1990. We have capable colleagues who have not been able to take the next step in serving our communities because of this licensure requirement, and this is negatively impacting our most vulnerable students and families. Suspending the current licensure requirements for entry level social work allows time to investigate the most equitable path forward while freeing up professionals to help those in need now.

I thank you for your careful consideration of this bill which will enable quality candidates to support our communities in need.

Sincerely,

Melissa McStay, LCSW  
School Social Worker  
Portland Public Schools  
Resident, Portland, ME