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**Testimony of Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler**

**Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services**

**Testifying in OPPOSITION to L.D. 1990**

**An Act To Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by  
Removing the Examination Requirement**

January 25, 2024

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). ASWB develops and administers the social work licensing examinations, while also providing resources, services, and technical support to regulatory entities throughout the United States and Canada. I am testifying before you today in opposition to **L.D. 1990, An Act To Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement.**

Founded more than 40 years ago, ASWB is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to social work regulation. Representing all 50 states, 4 U.S. territories, and 10 Canadian provinces, ASWB was formed when several boards joined together to address common needs including a uniform, objective process for minimum competence measurements. Core to our mission is accountability and public protection through promoting safe, competent, and ethical social work practices. Our work ensures that the State Board of Social Worker Licensure, as one of our member boards, has access to the data and tools required to provide oversight for the social work profession in Maine.

ASWB has grave concerns about the option to issue a license without an examination as permitted by this proposed legislation. We cannot support provisions that reduce professional standards through the removal of licensing examinations, as the consequences of this action would have significant and detrimental impacts.

As with other professions in Maine, social work is a licensed, regulated profession. This designation advances safe, competent, and ethical practices which strengthen public protection. It also demands uniform standards that uphold the public's confidence and trust. Licensed professions have a need for uniform entry-to-practice competence measures to protect the public and the professionals practicing within these fields. Professional examinations offer the only continuously vetted, objective measure of entry-to-practice competence in licensure issuance decisions.

ASWB works with a diverse cross-section of practicing social workers who assure the fairness and validity of the licensing examinations. These examinations source content about the social work practice, from those who are actually practicing. The professional examinations provide information qualitatively different from a candidate's degree from school, and are based on what those who currently work in real-world settings define as entry-to-practice knowledge, skills, and abilities. **These examinations are not academic capstones; they are post-graduate measures that complement information gleaned from applicants' educational backgrounds to make better decisions in support of strengthening public safety.**

Examinations represent a crucial step in the licensure process and are the only part of license issuance decisions overseen by regulatory entities, including the State Board of Social Worker Licensure. Importantly, the exams are the only uniform aspect of this process across jurisdictions. Best practices dictate that regulators should directly oversee some component of the vital decision, as opposed to singular reliance on an external sector such as education serving as the primary determiner of licensure approvals.

In August 2022, ASWB became the first health or human service regulatory association to publish a pass rate analysis report with disaggregated data. The analysis revealed outcome disparities across demographics like age and race. However, it is critical that we not mistake outcomes for origins. The descriptive data included as part of the report cannot be used to draw causal relationships. Candidates for licensure – across demographic subgroups – do not necessarily have access to the same resources or opportunities prior to their test dates. To assume as much requires making broad conclusions about the capabilities of certain subgroups.

**The development process involves robust anti-bias measures and embed layers of checks and balances beyond anything available in degree-granting institutions.** The social work examinations are reliable, valid, and involve a psychometric process that follows industry standards, developed jointly with the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. You have received a handout demonstrating ASWB's exam writing and design process, and I am happy to discuss these elements further at length.

While we are appreciative of the workforce needs identified by advocates of this proposed legislation, the professional standards for licensed social workers are not the cause of workforce shortages, and removing the examination requirement will not solve those issues. Reducing entry-to-practice standards will not prevent social workers from leaving the field, and may contribute to attrition when social workers are not adequately prepared with the necessary skills to practice. To effectively address workforce needs we must collectively address core workforce and retention issues such as compensation commensurate with level of education and experience, working conditions and manageable caseloads, exploration of tuition assistance, and diverse and inclusive recruitment practices.

This legislation would also call into question Maines' ability to participate in the Social Work Licensure Compact, an initiative being led by the Council of State Governments. The compact allows eligible social workers to practice in all states that join. To do so requires an element of licensure decisions that jurisdictions all have in common. Currently, that unifying element is the licensing examination. Maine social workers who do not take the exam may be limited from this opportunity. Further, granting a license solely on the basis of obtaining an educational degree will make Maine vulnerable to for-profit institutions, several of which now offer accredited social work degrees.

Social workers often serve the most vulnerable among us. This has such vast societal implications that the decision to issue a license to practice should at minimum include competence as measured by an objective industry standard. In line with the responsibility of regulated professions to uphold the public trust, examinations complement education in helping to verify minimum competence. In addition to investigating complaints and upholding legal compliance, verification of competence is a core regulatory function. The removal of the examination requirement, for any period of time, diminishes our accountability to the public we serve.

It is in this spirit that ASWB respectfully asks that the committee support profession-wide collaboration among educators, regulators, and advocates, which would have a more positive and longer-lasting impact on the profession's workforce, and those who social workers serve. It is my hope ASWB can work alongside the State Board of Social Worker Licensure and peer organizations to support even more social workers in finding success on their paths to licensure, and continued success throughout their careers. We welcome the opportunity to work in collaboration to address and resolve concerns for the best possible outcome – for the profession and for all residents of Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer questions from the committee and will be available for the work session.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy D. Handy Chandler, PhD, JD, LCSW". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative flourish at the beginning.

Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Social Work Boards

*ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.*