

Kovarsky Elizabeth
Brunswick
LD 1298

I am a practicing, licensed clinical social worker in the state of Maine, providing written testimony in support of this bill. Establishing an alternative pathway to licensure is necessary for many reasons, but the most important reason is that there is absolutely no data anywhere that proves that this exam indicates a social worker's knowledge about the field or their ability to practice. You will also not find a clinically licensed social worker who says that they practice exactly the way they answered their exam questions. We are quite literally taught in exam prep courses (which are expensive, on top of having to pay for our graduate school education at an accredited university, where we have to do free labor during our internships for at least two years) to answer the questions on the exam as if you were a "middle-class white guy".

In 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards released data (because of public pressure, not of their own volition) revealing that those passing the licensure exam at the highest rates were young white women whose first language is English. The lowest pass rates are Black test-takers. This is seriously problematic for many reasons, but the first one is that we need our workforce to reflect the identities of the actual clients that we serve if we are to serve them well. Also, we complain about the staffing shortages in this profession, so instead of gatekeeping the social work profession, let's find another way.

Let's value the many hours of hard work that social workers devote to attending accredited institutions of higher education where we are required to complete two supervised years of unpaid labor. Let's continue to require additional two years of work post-graduation, under supervision from established social workers. The current licensure exam process really only benefits a privileged few: The ASWB, businesses that administer the exam, and the white women (myself included) who passed the exam on the first attempt. There are enough barriers to becoming a social worker, like having to work for free during grad schools, having to be able to afford education in the first place, and getting accepted to an accredited university.