



4/15/25 Support of LD 1298 An Act to Establish Alternative Pathways to Social Work Licensing

Kate Marble, Clinical Director, Health Affiliates Maine

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services,

My name is Kate Marble, and I am a resident of Temple, Maine, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and the Clinical Director at Health Affiliates Maine—a statewide behavioral health agency serving over 10,000 Mainers. I am writing to express my strong support for **LD 1298, "An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Work Licensing."** This bill directly addresses two pressing issues facing our state: the severe shortage of licensed social workers and the significant barriers many individuals encounter in the current licensure examination process.

I support this bill because we urgently need solutions to address the shortage of providers in our communities, and LD 1298 offers a meaningful strategy to reduce barriers to entering the profession. Maine's shortage of licensed social workers is having a devastating impact on access to care. A behavioral health point-in-time study published last fall revealed that nearly **9,000 individuals are waiting an average of eight months** for mental health counseling services.

At Health Affiliates Maine, our current waitlists are alarming: 500 individuals are waiting for case management, 215 for psychiatric services, and 700 for outpatient counseling. At one point, our case management waitlist swelled to 800 while we tried to fill a master's level clinical supervisor position. Despite offering a highly competitive salary and benefits package, it took over a year to fill the role. This one position supports up to **15 case managers**, each with full caseloads. When this position was filled, we could resume hiring case managers and reduce the waitlist. This illustrates the systemic impact of staffing shortages within a single program at just one agency.

Unfortunately, we are losing capable professionals due to an **unfair and flawed licensing barrier**. LD 1298 offers a responsible and pragmatic solution by creating **alternative pathways to licensure** for qualified individuals who have demonstrated their competence through education and experience, but who face challenges with the current ASWB exam.

While the ASWB exam is intended to assess social work competency, it has well-documented flaws. The **2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis** revealed troubling disparities: first-time pass



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rates for the Clinical social work licensing exam between 2018 and 2021 were **84% for White examinees**, compared to **45% for Black examinees**, **65% for Hispanic/Latino examinees**, and **72% for Asian examinees**. These stark differences raise serious concerns about systemic bias in the exam and demand a more equitable path to licensure.

It's important to note: **this bill does not propose eliminating the examination**. Rather, it provides an alternative route to demonstrate competency **after a candidate has attempted and not passed the exam**. The bill still requires a comprehensive assessment of qualifications, ensuring high standards while promoting fairness. It also removes financial and other barriers that disproportionately affect underrepresented groups, enabling a more diverse, inclusive social work workforce.

As a clinical director, I fully recognize the importance of maintaining rigorous standards in social work practice. At the same time, I strongly believe in the principle of **equitable access to licensure**. LD 1298 strikes the right balance—preserving competency while eliminating unnecessary and inequitable obstacles. It ensures a more comprehensive, just, and accurate evaluation of a candidate's ability to serve.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote in favor of LD 1298. This legislation is vital to strengthening our social work workforce, reducing waitlists, expanding access to critical behavioral health services, and ultimately improving the well-being of all Mainers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kate Marble, LCSW

Clinical Director, Health Affiliates Maine
Resident, Temple, Maine