

Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, Attn: Edna Cayford
c/o Legislative Information Office Cross Building, Room 220
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: *LD 1298: An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing*

Good Afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services.

My name is Ann Hartman, and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Maine. I'm testifying today in support of *LD 1298: An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing*. I have been practicing as a social worker in Maine since I graduated with my MSW in 1998, and I have since worked in community agencies, a high school, private practice, and higher education. It is from all of these vantage points that I have witnessed the way that the Association of Social Work Board (ASWB) standardized exam has been a harmful barrier in the social work licensing process and has kept otherwise qualified applicants from practicing in our state.

It is no secret that we have an emergency shortage of social workers in our state. Through my professional practice and relationships with social service agencies and people in my community, I see every day how people in need are going without the mental health care they deserve to be well. We are in a crisis in our state. There aren't enough social workers to care for our community members. People are suffering, and the lack of routine, preventative, responsive mental health care has caused health care costs to soar.

The licensing exam has acted as an unfair, biased, unnecessary barrier to otherwise talented, qualified applicants, especially, as has been documented, individuals of color and for those whom English is not their primary language. This exam has systematically kept skilled, accomplished would be social workers from getting licensed, resulting in test takers retaking the expensive exam, sometimes multiple times, in addition to spending money on test preparation materials. Many test takers' ability to earn a wage at their educational attainment level to support their families and repay their loans has been unfairly delayed by this exam.

Having alternative pathways for licensure, if a first attempt at the exam is unsuccessful, will reduce the inordinate amount of stress and cost of repeat attempts to test-takers of this high stakes, unnecessary exam, while ensuring that would be social workers demonstrate their competence and ability to serve our state's communities. We must act now to ensure our licensure process is fair, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse needs of our state.

LD 1298 is a win for everyone in Maine because it honors the training, experience, and hard work of graduates of our Schools of Social Work.

We can take the right step by making the positive choice to establish these alternative pathways to social worker licensing and end the unnecessary high stakes exam barrier that is hurting the people of our state. I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1298.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann Hartman", followed by a long, horizontal, wavy flourish.

Ann Hartman LCSW
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