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Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and honorable members of the HCIFS Committee. Of course, use your own “voice” here.

My name is Dr. Regina Phillips. Before Sunday, when I learned more about this bill, I had always considered myself a social worker.

I’ve worked with homeless and/or unhoused teens and families

I managed a HeadStart/Childcare Center, a homeless family shelter, and a refugee services program.

I’ve chaired, established, and sat on countless committees to look at youth justice, health/mental health disparities, housing, and employment discrimination, to name a few

I’m currently the co-founder of a non-profit organization I formed with two of my friends/colleagues, providing EDI training and working to reduce institutional and systemic racism in the areas of oral and behavioral health, ageism, and sexual assault. I’ve advocated for the rights of U.S.-born Blacks, the poor, refugees and immigrants, and LGBTQ+ communities.

I have a master's degree and a doctorate in social work.

So, for these reasons, I have called myself a social worker, even though Maine, with its version of “title protection”, has barred me from doing so because I don’t have a piece of paper stating I passed a test, which is a requirement for licensure in our state. I’ve taken the ASWB exam twice and failed both times because the questions genuinely don’t make sense. This is just like the SAT, which some colleges don’t require anymore because it’s not a measure of educational success or someone’s lived experiences.

Nationally, only 14.5% of Black people have a DSW. I can’t tell you the percentage in Maine, as it’s not tracked. I know there are only a handful in Maine, as my organization has offered a Black History Month Community Wellness Fair for the last five years, and we can’t find Black social workers in Maine. We recruit social workers from out of state to come to Maine to share their expertise.

Requiring social workers to do an internship, then an exam, be supervised for 2 years, then retake the test seems entirely and utterly inequitable, and equity is one of our core social work competencies! I’ve spent my 40-year social work career dismantling unfair practices like this, and I can see now that I’m not done. Therefore, I plead with you to pass this bill so that I can continue to be proud of my career and continue to serve the people I’ve helped and will help in the future. We shouldn’t be trying to make things harder for people. We should encourage every single person, especially brown and black people, who is dedicated to this profession to have this opportunity to change lives.