



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Lori Gramlich neither for nor against*

## **LD 1990, An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services*

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and my esteemed colleagues on the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Lori Gramlich and I proudly represent House District 131, which is the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach.

I am here today to provide testimony neither for nor against LD 1990, An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement.

As I understand it, the bill sponsor has offered an amendment to this proposed legislation. However, as of this morning when I had crafted my testimony for this bill, I had not seen the amended language. I will add, though, that I had been involved in numerous stakeholder meetings with the Speaker, legislative colleagues and advocates regarding this proposed policy initiative.

Before I get into the details of this bill, I wanted to frame my perspective by way of background. I am currently a Licensed Master Social Worker and have been practicing in the state of Maine for nearly 35 years. I began my career as a Program Specialist for the Department of Human Services, out of the Bangor Regional Office, in 1986. I then transitioned to the Department's Central Offices in Augusta, initially as a foster care specialist, then as acting Program Director for the Adoption Assistance Program and finally as personnel investigator for the division of personnel. I share this with you because in these various roles, I had to be licensed at the base level of social work licensure as a Licensed Social Worker (LSW). At that time, and I believe currently, the LSW licensure requirement for certain classifications within DHHS for staff remains.

Additionally, I have been an adjunct faculty at the University of Southern Maine, Department of Social Work for the last 8 years, and most recently had been Field Coordinator for the Department's Field Education Program. Prior to my tenure in the Legislature, I had been executive director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

I am currently a Licensed Master Social Worker and identify as a Macro Practitioner. When I went to graduate school, I did so with the intent of becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, with an intent

of engaging in private clinical practice. This was informed, in part, by my background in clinical psychology; however, after my first semester of public policy, and my academic coursework which included the founding principles of our profession, my practice focused on Macro Practice.

These founding principles that I just referenced are rooted in social justice and humanitarianism and can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Key influencers and pioneers in the field, such as Jane Addams and Mary Ellen Richmond, emphasized the importance of addressing societal issues and advocating for the well-being of vulnerable populations.

The settlement house movement, for example, which began in the late 19th century, played a significant role in the development of social work. Settlement houses were community centers that aimed to improve the living conditions of immigrants and the urban poor. They provided a range of services, including education, healthcare, and social support.

The early social work profession focused on addressing social inequalities, poverty, and advocating for social reforms.

Over time, social work has evolved to encompass a broad range of practice areas, including clinical work, community organizing, policy advocacy, and more. Throughout its history, the profession has remained committed to promoting social justice and enhancing the well-being of individuals and communities.

The focus on clinical therapy within the field of social work evolved over time in response to various factors and societal changes.

The importance of clinical practice versus macro practice in social work depends on various factors, including individual preferences, skills, professional goals, and the specific needs of the populations being served. Both clinical and macro practice are integral components of the social work profession, and they contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

I would argue that the work I engage in as a macro practitioner is no less important than the work that my MSW colleagues engage in as clinical practitioners. Unfortunately for the last 20 - 30 years, the clinical aspects of our profession have become more valued, which quite frankly has swayed from the founding principles of our profession.

There is no universally more important aspect between clinical and macro practice in social work. The significance depends on the context, the needs of the individuals or communities being served, and the strengths and preferences of the social worker; thus, eliminating the licensing exam for one portion of our practice, further compromises the integrity and fidelity of our profession and perpetuates and exacerbates the wedge between the two modes of practice.

If we concede that the social work licensing exam - which is a standardized exam and the same exam regardless of the state where the test is taken, is arguably biased and a poor reflection of post graduate practice - is flawed and biased, why then is it only flawed and biased for one portion of our practice?

I believe that this issue is indeed worthy of study, so that the details of how we can measure post graduate competencies can be realized.