

Testimony by: Stephanie Vinson

To: Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services (HCIFS)

Re: LD1990

January 25, 2024

My name is Stephanie Vinson. I am currently a senior in the Master of Social Work program at UMaine, and I come before you today to speak in favor of LD1990.

It's January, and that means that spring semester has just started. For a senior in the MSW hybrid program at UMaine, this means returning to internship positions, applying for graduation, and that classes are now underway. I have been with the same cohort since I began this program in the fall of 2021. It has been a true joy to grow and learn alongside one another. Just this past Saturday we met together to begin one of our spring classes and our professor asked us each to introduce ourselves and give a bit of our professional background. This is an exercise that consistently leaves me in awe.

I have the distinct pleasure of learning alongside individuals of the highest professional caliber. You see, myself and many of my classmates would be considered "non-traditional" students. Many of us have been out of formal education and working in our chosen field for some time already. Some of us may have always had graduate school in mind and were waiting for the time to be right. Others may have come to learn that to illicit the type of change we want, we needed to further our education. But whatever brought us together, the experience, insight, wisdom, and understanding of self that my peers bring with them into the classroom is staggering. We have collectively served countless vulnerable populations here in Maine, in a myriad of settings, under less-than ideal circumstances, for many, many years. We serve your children, your parents, your veterans, your sick, your marginalized, and your forgotten. We advocate, we educate. We blaze trails, and walk alongside. We do it with compassion and understanding for the individuals, groups, and communities that we are called to serve. And this is just my cohort.

In addition to all of us returning to internships and applying for graduation and starting our spring classes, we are all beginning preparations for the ASWB test we are required to take before we are allowed to continue with the very important and time-sensitive work that we do. After completion of a rigorous 3-year, nationally accredited graduate school program complete with more than 1,000 hands-on practicum hours and demonstrated mastery of the nine different social work competencies, the ASWB test does little more than bottle-neck would be change-agents and stand in the way of allowing myself, my cohort, and many others like us to hastily enter the field in a time when Maine's behavioral health consumer population needs us the most.

It is with those that we serve in mind that I urge you to remove the post-graduation examination requirement for Social Workers, as outlined in LD1990.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Vinson