

## HCIFS Legislative Committee Public Comments re:

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

Honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Jeff Tiner, and I serve as the Chief Program Officer for Clinical Services at Catholic Charities Maine. On behalf our organization, and as a licensed social worker of 28 years, I am here to offer for your consideration a few thoughts and concerns we have about the potential unintended consequences of LD 1990.

Catholic Charities Maine has a long history, as do many providers in our State, of actively supporting the social work interns from our partnering universities. We provide quality clinical supervision and professional development opportunities to our licensed social workers, as well as other credentialed clinical disciplines.

We also recognize the current and chronic need for an expanded, competent, and diverse workforce in the helping professions to support and sustain quality treatment services to our most vulnerable citizens here in Maine.

While this bill may well move the needle for two of these three elements, namely increased numbers and diversity, the question is at what cost...

#### **Please consider the following:**

1. The 2022 ASWB data that prompted this proposal does indeed shine a light on a significant and sobering CORRELATION in examination PASS/FAIL rates across racial categories (gender and age correlations as well, but I will limit my comments here). This should alarm us. And it should prompt a collective call to action. Disproportionate poverty rates, as well as disparities in access to quality primary and secondary educational opportunities that adversely impact minorities are among the areas worthy of attention. The same holds true for access to examination study resources, and yes, the ongoing refinement of examination content to guard against bias. On this point, I will defer to the ASWB representatives who can speak specifically to that process. It is important to note a number of these potentially salient factors were noted in the research itself.

Despite this, the proposed solution appears to be premised on significantly or exclusively assigning CAUSALITY to potentially bias questions in the examinations, and by so doing move to waive this entire process. And this, we posit, constitutes a disproportionate response that will ultimately undermine the quality of client services. The populations we serve need and deserve quality, competent care. To waive this would eliminate one of the few metrics by which we can

assess competence and could potentially disincentivize students in striving for higher levels of mastery in their coursework. In addition, any manager will tell you performance disparities can create frustration across the existing workforce. In the simplest terms, a lesser prepared incoming workforce creates additional burdens on our existing staff (supervisory, colleagues, etc.), which adversely impacts operations, morale, and most important, the quality of care for our clients. We already experience increased challenges with the work-readiness of graduates (i.e. more reluctance to community-based client engagement, higher rates of anxiety/depression among students in general, an increase in adjustment challenges to real-life work demands, responsibilities and professional development. And all of this is occurring in the context of serving populations that are consistently presenting with a demonstrably higher level of acuity in the community).

2. While the inability to “bill” for recently graduated students in certain settings until they successfully pass their exam can be a financial challenge for providers, including CCM, we would gladly continue to support our staff through the process, and struggle with that systemic gap rather than eliminate the examination process.
3. Then there are other professions. The value of maintaining structured evaluative processes that provide some modicum of assurance that individuals possess the requisite skills and core competencies to practice in their respective professions is nearly universally recognized. Lawyers, doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, EMTs, law enforcement, and closer to home, our fellow clinicians who are LCPCs, LMFTs etc. ALL require some form of examination to assess competence and preserve the quality standards of their respective professions.

For these reasons, we respectfully suggest a more surgical approach by supporting the ongoing refinement and alignment of examination content, insuring timely, affordable, and appropriate access and accommodations as needed, and focus our energy on the larger systemic challenges that contribute to the PASS/FAIL disparities. We believe this approach would put our profession on a path to strengthening both the quality, quantity, and diversity of this important profession. Thank you again for your time today.