

Testimony for LD1298: An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing presented by: Senator Rachel Talbot Ross with Representative Lydia Crafts, Senator Richard Bennett, Senator Donna Bailey (Chair of HCIFS), Senator Marianne Moore, Representative Joshua Morris, Representative Holly Stover, Senator Joseph Baldacci, Representative Poppy Arford and Representative Deqa Dhalac

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee (HCIFS). My name is Grace Ott and I am a (LCSW) Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Maine and Florida and previously have held a LMSW in New York State.

It is an honor to stand up and urge you to support unanimously this “bipartisan” bill. Maine **needs** alternative pathways to social work licensure for those candidates that have tried and failed the ASWB (Association of Social Work Boards) exams that are the only exams offered for social workers at all levels of licensure, Bachelors, Masters and Clinical.

What I am about to say is personal and a little embarrassing!!!! **I am a statistic!** That’s correct, I fall into the category of data of being an “older adult”. The data released in 2022 by ASWB showed the following: First-time test takers between the ages of 18 and 29 had a **91%** eventual pass rate between 2018 and 2021, according to the report, while test takers 50 and older had a **64.8% pass rate**. That is a 26.2% difference from being a younger test taker to being an older perhaps second career test taker such as me. (Link to report on aswb.org <https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-ASWB-Exam-Pass-Rate-Analysis.pdf>)

I passed the Masters level exam at age 50, but did not pass the clinical exam on the first try a few years later that was required for the career I wanted in Clinical Social Work. As you may have heard from others, the ASWB exams are biased in other ways as well specifically against people of color and when English may be their second language. I am just testifying today from my experience as an “older adult” and bringing awareness to you on this specific data.

Why didn't I pass the Clinical exam on the first try? I had gone to a prestigious graduate school of social work in New York City and passed the Masters level exam on the first try. Good question!! I was simply "older" and I don't know about you, but I drink water and usually caffeinated beverages in the morning, and I cannot wait 4 hours to go to the bathroom. Especially when the bathroom at this specific testing site was all the way around the corner past the elevators on the opposite side of the building.

Don't give me "the exam matters," it is the person, their experience and competence as a practitioner that matters! It also matters whether you have access to test prep classes and the ability to pay for these expensive exams multiple times.

This committee and the entire Maine Legislature have the power to change laws and regulations to make the difference in peoples' careers and second careers. **You** have the ability to impact our behavioral healthcare and social services workforce shortage crisis. Please **vote ought to pass** and give social workers at all levels an alternative pathway to licensure if they have tried and failed the ASWB exam at least once.

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