



Testimony in Support of
LD 1298, An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing
Presented by Charlotte Warren, M.A.Ed., M.S.W.
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Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. My name is Charlotte Warren, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative in strong support of LD 1298, An Act to Create Alternative Pathways to Social Work Licensing. The Behavioral Health Community Collaborative is a group of seven community mental health agencies that serve over 70% of Maine people seeking mental health treatment. In addition to my role as a policy consultant, I speak as a master's level social worker and master's level educator. Since 2015, I have served as an adjunct faculty member in the University of New England's Graduate School of Social Work.

Maine is facing a critical shortage of behavioral health providers. You have heard that case be made by my colleagues today. There's one piece of the behavioral health workforce crisis that's perhaps most alarming: 40% of responding individual providers are age 60+, with 45% of them reporting plans to retire in 5-10 years. This looming retirement cliff will only deepen our workforce crisis if we don't act now.

While we need to be exploring every possible avenue to strengthen our behavioral health workforce, the ASWB examination represents a significant barrier that disproportionately impacts certain groups. You've heard that data today as well. In a state like Maine, where we desperately need providers who can serve our increasingly diverse communities and rural areas, we cannot afford to maintain licensure barriers that have been documented to limit workforce diversity and supply. Service reductions directly impact Maine's most vulnerable residents, including children and those with serious mental illness who require higher levels of care.

According to the Office of Child and Family Services [Children's Behavioral Health Data Dashboard](#), 422 Maine children were on the waitlist for home and community-based treatment in January of 2025 (most recent available data). Here's a breakdown for a few counties: In Penobscot County, 110 children were on the waitlist for an average of 163 days; in York County there were 29 children with an average wait of 135 days. Finally, 44 children were waiting an average of 134 days in Androscoggin County.

The members of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative are Sweetser, Inc., Opportunity Alliance, Volunteers of America, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Spurwink, Community Concepts

You don't need to be a social worker to understand that untreated behavioral health issues in Maine's children do not get better on their own.

So, to recap, we have a biased exam combined with a well-known behavioral health workforce crisis. **A common-sense solution is to create another pathway that the licensing board can utilize.** To that point, it's essential to recognize that licensure examinations are just one component of a licensing board's responsibilities. As defined in Maine law:

"The sole purpose of an occupational and professional regulatory board is to protect the public health and welfare. A board carries out this purpose by ensuring that the public is served by competent and honest practitioners and by establishing minimum standards of proficiency in the regulated professions by **examining, licensing, regulating and disciplining practitioners of those regulated professions.**" (10 M.R.S. § 8008)

Typically, licensing laws include some combination of requisite education, experience, and examination to ensure competence. **An examination is often used as one tool to assess competence, but it is not the only tool.** Just as importantly, once licensed, the board holds the licensee to professional standards and disciplines individuals who engage in conduct that violates those standards. Any required licensing and regulating functions must be necessary to protect public health and welfare.

The proposed legislation establishes clear alternative pathways for those who have attempted but failed to complete the examination prescribed by the board. These pathways are rigorous and maintain high standards while removing an unnecessary barrier. **And they do not diminish the board's ability to protect the public. The licensing board would retain its full authority to regulate practice and discipline practitioners regardless of their pathway to licensure.** The jurisprudence examination ensures knowledge of relevant laws and ethical standards, while the supervised practice and consultation requirements provide a robust assessment of competence in real-world settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony today. I'd be happy to answer any questions or bring additional information to the work session.