

Testimony of Genevieve McDonald
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
In OPPOSITION to LD 1298
An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing

April 15, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Genevieve McDonald of Stonington, and I am speaking on behalf of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the organization responsible for developing and administering the social work licensing examinations used throughout the United States and Canada. We respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to LD 1298, which proposes the establishment of alternative pathways to social work licensure in Maine that would bypass the licensing examination.

Social workers are entrusted with the responsibility of supporting individuals, families, and communities through complex, often vulnerable situations. To ensure the safety and well-being of the public, it is essential that all licensed social workers demonstrate a standardized level of competence. The ASWB licensing exam is a robust and psychometrically validated tool that assesses the knowledge, skills, and ethical judgment necessary for competent, social work practice. It is not simply a test; it is a safeguard—one that ensures that those entering the profession are prepared to meet its challenges.

The proponents of LD 1298 have proposed replacing or supplementing this exam with a jurisprudence exam focused solely on local laws and regulations. While such exams are important for understanding the legal framework in which social workers operate, they are not designed to evaluate professional competence in areas such as assessment, intervention, ethics, and human behavior. We respectfully highlight the following key differences between a professional competence-based exam and a jurisprudence exam:

Focus on Practice: The licensing exam evaluates real-world skills and ethical decision-making—core competencies that are essential for effective practice. Jurisprudence exams, by contrast, are limited in scope and do not assess practical readiness.

Demonstrated Competence: Our exam requires candidates to demonstrate the ability to think critically and act ethically in scenarios reflective of actual social work environments. This is far more comprehensive than completing an open-book regulatory quiz.

Consistency Across Jurisdictions: The licensing exam provides a uniform standard that ensures all social workers, regardless of geography, meet the same baseline for competence. A standardized licensing exam supports professional mobility across states and provinces. The jurisprudence exam, being jurisdiction-specific, does not. The ASWB exam is a requirement for social workers to participate in the multistate Social Work Licensure Compact, of which Maine is a member.

Rigor and Validity: The ASWB exam is developed in partnership with psychometric experts and continuously updated to reflect current best practices. It is a rigorously validated tool designed to be fair, equitable, and legally defensible. More information about the exam development process is included in the testimony of Lavina Harless, Senior Director of Exam Services for the Association of Social Work Boards.

Comprehensive Assessment: The licensing exam assesses a broad spectrum of essential topics, including human development, diversity, interventions, and ethical responsibilities. The jurisprudence exam's narrow legal focus cannot substitute for this broad measure of readiness.

While we support efforts to enhance equity and accessibility in licensure, we believe strongly that eliminating the current licensing examination would jeopardize public protection and undermine professional standards. A jurisprudence-only approach is not sufficient to ensure that social workers are competent to serve Maine's most vulnerable populations.

We respectfully urge you to preserve the integrity of the licensure process by maintaining the requirement for a comprehensive competence-based licensing examination.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to answer questions.