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Senator Donna Bailey of York- Chair  
Committee On Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

### ***Re: Opposition to LD 1298 "An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing"***

April 15, 2025

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services,

My name is Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). ASWB is the professional regulatory association providing technical support, resources, and services to the 64 state and provincial social work licensing authorities in the U.S. and Canada. Created in 1979, ASWB develops and administers the licensing examinations. Our mission is to promote safe, competent, and ethical social work practices through consistent, evidence-based regulatory standards.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to L.D. 1298, *An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing*. ASWB appreciates and supports the need to expand access to quality social work services in the state. However, the elimination of an exam requirement does not address the cause of workforce shortages and will have long-term consequences for social work professional standards. This bill raises two crucial concerns: it lowers licensure standards which poses risks to the public, and it runs directly counter to the Interstate Social Work Compact (32 M.R.S. § 7081 (2024)), passed in Maine just last year.

As with other licensed professions in Maine, social work is a regulated field precisely because of the vital role it plays in public safety and well-being. That designation demands uniform entry-to-practice standards that uphold competence and reinforce public confidence. The licensing examination is a key part of that process.

The social work licensing exam is the only uniform and objective measurement of competence available across jurisdictions—like the exams used in fields like medicine, law, and nursing. A recent national survey conducted by the American Foundation for Research and Consumer Education in Social Work Regulation found that 76% of social workers believe the exam is crucial in maintaining professional standards, and 67% agree that it is a vital measure of competence.

ASWB voluntarily published disaggregated exam performance outcome data in August of 2022 to support conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion in the social work profession. ASWB is facilitating numerous initiatives and working diligently from our area of influence to foster solutions to address pass rate disparities. ASWB is funding academic research, making continuous improvements to assessment instruments, expanding support for test-takers, making free resources available to

educators, and engaging leadership within the social work community to seek out broader collaboration. However, ASWB alone cannot solve the systemic challenges which are responsible for the differences in exam pass rates amongst racial / ethnic cohorts. Eliminating the licensing exam requirement in the State of Maine will do nothing to address the larger systems problems and lack of resources affecting test-takers' success.

Eliminating the licensing exam requirement without a validated, objective alternative poses serious risks to public safety. It introduces inconsistency across licensure decisions and undermines the confidence of the communities we serve, particularly those who rely on social workers during vulnerable and often critical moments in their lives.

While we understand and appreciate the workforce concerns driving this legislation, we believe lowering entry standards is not the solution. In fact, it could have the opposite effect, contributing to burnout and attrition by placing underprepared individuals into challenging roles. True workforce support must include structural solutions such as competitive compensation, manageable caseloads, student loan relief, improved working conditions, and robust recruitment strategies that prioritize equity and diversity.

Last year Maine adopted the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. The Compact requires social workers to take and pass the qualifying national exam that corresponds to the category of multistate license sought. Therefore, LD 1298, if passed, would set up a bifurcated licensing system in the state where social workers are licensed under two different standards. This will create differences among social workers with the same "licensed" title, and raises concerns such as:

- Uncertainty for Mainers as consumers of social work services who deserve clarity on what a 'licensed social worker' means;
- Disadvantages for social workers themselves who may face opportunity limitations their counterparts licensed with the exam would not face. For example, their qualifications may be challenged in court-involved cases when called to be qualified as an expert witness. Or in the case of the Veterans Health Administration, social workers who lack an exam as part of their license status are not eligible for promotion to an advance from an entry level position.
- Increased administrative complexity and cost for the licensing agency charged with implementing regulations.

Social workers serve the most vulnerable members of our society. For this reason, the decision to grant a license must include a minimum standard of demonstrated competence through an objective, validated examination process. Removing that requirement erodes our accountability and weakens public trust. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee for a negative report on L.D. 1298. Please preserve the licensing examination as a critical safeguard for social work licensure in Maine. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,



Stacey D. Hardy-Chandler, PhD, JD, LCSW, PGDip  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Social Work Boards

*ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.*