



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich neither for nor against*

## **LD 1298, An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services*

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. I am Lori Gramlich. I have the honor of representing House District 131, which is the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach, and of serving as Assistant House Majority Leader. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today neither for nor against ***LD 1298, An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing***.

Before I get into the details of this bill, I want to frame my perspective by way of background and professional experience. I am a Licensed Master Social Worker and have been practicing in the state of Maine for nearly 35 years. I began my career as a program specialist for the Department of Human Services, out of the Bangor Regional Office, in 1986. I then transitioned to the Department's central offices in Augusta, initially as a foster care specialist, then as acting Program Director for the Adoption Assistance Program, and finally as personnel investigator for the Division of Personnel. I share this with you because, in these various roles, I had to be licensed at the base level of social work licensure as a Licensed Social Worker (LSW). I believe the LSW licensure requirement for certain classifications within DHHS for staff remains in place currently.

Additionally, I have been an adjunct faculty at the University of Southern Maine, Department of Social Work for the last ten years, and most recently had been Field Coordinator for the Department's Field Education Program. Prior to my tenure in the Legislature, I had been executive director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. I share my background simply to illustrate my extensive experience with social work licensure requirements, both as a Licensed Master Social Worker myself and as someone who has supported many, many others navigating social work education, training and licensure processes.

I truly appreciate the work that stakeholders have put in on this proposal, making great strides over the past year and a half. I know we share the same goals: making high quality mental and behavioral health care accessible and affordable to all Mainers, ensuring that agencies have adequate staffing, and training and licensing enough providers to deliver these critically important services. At its core, this is a workforce issue.

At this time, I am testifying neither for nor against the bill as drafted due to several concerns that I hope the committee will address before moving forward with the proposal. I have also expressed these concerns in conversations with advocates, including NASW and NAMI Maine.

For example, it is not clear who will be responsible for the design, administration and review of the proposed evaluations or for overseeing the expanded consultation agreement outlined in Section 6 of the bill. It is also unclear what exactly the jurisprudence exam will entail. The current licensing exam is standardized across states; if we are going to choose to strike out on our own, however admirable our reasons for doing so, we need to be clear and thoughtful about the direction we are taking.

Additionally, to adequately carry out the proposed changes, the licensure board and other involved entities will need the time, staff and resources to devote to the transition. It remains unclear to me where those resources will come from and, indeed, if all the affected stakeholders, particularly the state government agencies that will be most impacted by these changes, are at the table and on board with moving forward.

Finally, as I stated when the iteration of this bill was before this committee last session and will highlight again now, I remain concerned about the disparity in the requirements outlined in the bill for the LMSW level of licensure and the LCSW level of licensure. Whatever criteria is determined to be most appropriate for one should also be applied to the other.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to try to answer any questions you may have for me.