

Testimony in Support of

LD 1990: An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement.

**Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
January 25, 2024**

**Sandra S. Butler, PhD, Director, School of Social Work, University of Maine
Beverly Wagner, EdD, Director, Department of Social Work, University of Maine at
Presque Isle**

**Jeanette Andonian, PhD, Associate Dean, School of Social Work, University of
Southern Maine**

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services. My name is Sandy Butler, and I am the Director of the School of Social Work at the University of Maine. I present this testimony in collaboration with my colleagues, the Directors of the other two social work programs in the University of Maine System: Drs. Jeanette Andonian and Beverly Wagner. We are all in strong support of LD 1990, An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement.

We are in favor of eliminating the licensing exams at the LSW (undergraduate), LMSW and LMSW-CC (graduate) levels given the recently revealed information from the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) regarding racial bias in their exams. It has been shown that certain populations consistently have lower pass rates. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people whose first language is not English, and older adults have, on average, lower pass rates than people without those social identities. For example, [in Maine, Black test takers](#) from 2011 to 2021 had a first-time pass rate of 59.1%, while white test takers during that time had a first-time pass rate of 93.7%. This is preventing many potential social workers from entering the field and providing services our state so desperately needs.

Collectively our social work programs graduate hundreds of Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) students each year. These students complete extensive competency-based education, including supervised practicum training in community agencies. Our programs have full accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). When our students graduate, they are well prepared to practice, and their ability to practice should not be based on racially biased, multiple-choice exams. Soon after the data was released by ASWB last year, CSWE made the following statement: [“In many cases, a licensing exam may be redundant because](#)

[graduating from an accredited program of social work is evidence of achievement of the competencies articulated by the CSWE and the social work education community.”](#)

Communities of color have been particularly harmed by this unnecessary and discriminatory gatekeeping that has resulted from biased licensing exams. Biased exams lead to excluding qualified social workers. Maine currently has a severe workforce shortage, and many agencies are going without the social workers they require to meet the social and health needs of their clients. After the state of Illinois eliminated the exam from their licensing requirements, the number of social workers granted licenses [went up seven times in a six-month](#) period compared to the year before, allowing that state to better meet its need for behavioral health practitioners.

As leaders of the University of Maine System’s three social work programs we urge you to support LD 1990, including the recently proposed amendment calling for a moratorium on the social work licensing exam requirement for the LSW, LMSW, and LMSW-CC for three years and the creation of a Licensing Task Force, which will examine the impacts of this moratorium.

Thank you, Senator Bailey and Representative Perry for allowing me to testify, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.