

Cynthia Cushing  
Readfield  
LD 1990

Testimony before the  
Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services (HCIFS)

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

My name is Cynthia Cushing and I am a case manager for adults with developmental disabilities as well as a Master of Social Work student at the University of Maine. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1990, An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement.

In more than 10 years of working with adults with developmental disabilities, I have encountered many social workers, most of whom are dedicated to their craft and who continue their efforts to remain updated as to best practices in this field. That said, I have also worked with social workers who are an embarrassment to the title of social worker. While I recognize that there is a protocol for reporting bad behavior among social workers, I mention these discrepancies to relay a point: Every one of the social workers with whom I have been affiliated had to pass the examination to be able to practice.

I am in favor of this Bill because, while it places a moratorium on this examination process through 2027, it also works to ensure that protocols are in place for vetting those who want to engage in this work long term. LD 1990 does not remove the examination required to work as a clinician; Licensed Clinical Social Worker processes remain in place. I am in favor of the creation of a legislative Social Work Licensing Task Force for review and consideration of alternative ways to become a licensed social worker; ways which are not prohibitive to marginalized groups and which, perhaps, will entail more checks and balances long term than a one-time exam does.

This Bill does not change any of the current supervisory requirements in place, nor does it remove a social worker's need to engage in continuing education in order to remain licensed. These are necessary components for this field and this work, and the proponents of this Bill recognize the importance of these requirements.

Data recently released by The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) indicates that this test is prohibitive for historically marginalized groups, test takers whose second language is English, and older adults who want to engage in this work. There is a cost to take the exam; every failure means an added financial burden on top of the emotional component of not having passed. Removal of this exam would demonstrate Maine's willingness to work to conquer inequitable barriers toward marginalized groups in social work employment and promote engagement in a career which benefits us all.

LD 1990 works to empower our schools of social work, which have been through a rigorous accreditation process and through which standards of curriculums and programming are consistently updated, to train their students and to encourage graduates to remain in Maine to share their knowledge and skills, while also promoting the relationships between a clinical supervisor and a new employee. As Maine is in the midst of a behavioral health crisis, passage of LD 1990 would allow students who have successfully passed these college courses and who have been exposed to social worker training through practicums to get to work immediately, while being supervised by more experienced licensed social workers. They can begin now to help address the myriad mental health needs in Maine.

In closing, I would like to say that all clients deserve to receive treatment by social workers who they know, who are representatives of their community. Removing this exam allows that to happen in a much more organic fashion. Thank you very much

for giving me the opportunity to provide this testimony today.