

January 17, 2024

**Testimony re: LD 1990: A moratorium on the ASWB exam for LSW, LMSW, and LMSW-CC levels of Maine licensure**

To whom it may concern to:

My name is Maria Hammond, Deaf Case Manager from Maine Behavioral Healthcare, and I am writing to express concern about the inability to pass the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Licensing Exam and become licensed in state of Maine. My struggle with the ASWB Licensing Exam is posing a barrier for me when there is an urgent need for mental health services for the Deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) population. A high need for ASL fluent and D/HH therapists has been documented here in Maine, especially as it is very difficult to find qualified D/HH and signing therapists.

After completing my MSW program with a master's degree in 2015 from California, I relocated to Maine, my native state since birth with the goal to become a licensed Deaf therapist. Upon my return, I obtained a case management position at Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH), and continue to be employed there. I am considered an American Sign Language (ASL) fluent provider, knowledgeable in Deaf culture, as well as fluent in Cued Speech. My experiences from Maine and different states, including BSW and MSW internships brought provided a depth experience and knowledge for me. I continue to want to provide mental health services for the Deaf and hard of hearing population as a future licensed Deaf therapist.

My deafness has been a life-long disability and the greatest hindrance to gain the opportunity to become a licensed Deaf therapist has been to pass the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Licensing Exam since 2018 and 2019. I applied for a position in 2018 to 2019 but failed two exams and I had to remove myself as a candidate from MBH for a therapy position.

In 2019, I explored with Maine Board of Social Worker Licensure and the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Licensing to implement an exemption to social work licensing exam requirements due to the exam being subjective and English not being my first language. Some providers from Maine Board of Social Worker Licensure suggested that I reach out to the Association of Social Work Board (ASWB) because they cannot do anything about this. I did reach out to ASWB and received a denial notice that they would not consider waiving exam. Their response did not give me any hope then the COVID-19 pandemic happened in 2020 which ultimately caused a delay or inability to find an appropriate tutor to help prepare me to retake the exam. It resulted in my not finding a suitable tutor to assist me on understanding ASWB LMSW exam readiness.

The impact of the Lewiston shooting on the D/HH community and how this tragic event brought to light that the D/HH community is being woefully underserved here in Maine. For example, they need more ASL and Deaf culture fluent social workers and therapists. The lack of professional interpreters and mental health counselors was appalling at that time when communication was so vital to the wellbeing of victims and their families.

On behalf of the Deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) community of Maine, I urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1990. I look forward towards my opportunity to serve this community in our great state as a social worker and therapist.

Sincerely,

Maria (Mars) Hammond; MSW, MHRT/C  
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