

My name is Betsy Sweet, and I am here on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative - a group of 8 community-based organizations who provide mental health services to over 70 % of the people seeking mental health services in Maine.

I am writing to bring attention to the pressing issue surrounding social worker exams as a requirement for licensure and to advocate for their reconsideration. While acknowledging the significance of ensuring competency, I believe there are compelling reasons to reevaluate and potentially eliminate these exams.

Firstly, the current social worker exams have been perceived as burdensome – because of time, delays in testing and expense, as well as bias – imposing additional challenges on aspiring professionals. This burden disproportionately affects individuals who may already face socio-economic disadvantages, racism and hindering both their access to the mental health profession, and more importantly restricting access for patients who seek professionals who understand, and look like them.

There is growing awareness and hard data about the bias in these exams, leading to racial disparities in licensure outcomes. Eliminating such exams would contribute to a more equitable system, removing barriers that may disproportionately affect minority candidates.

Furthermore, the mental health field is grappling with a shortage of professionals. The exam requirements, including costs, may be exacerbating this shortage by dissuading qualified individuals from pursuing careers as social workers. Streamlining the licensure process could help address this critical shortage and ensure more accessible mental health services for those in need.

For the agencies and employers, I represent, they are willing and able to take on the responsibility of assuring “quality”. Employees are hired with a probationary period, during which we evaluate people’s competency and ability to meet the requirements of the job. This is a far more accurate and useful evaluations of someone’s competency than a standardized, biased test.

I urge you to explore alternative methods of assessing competency that are fair, unbiased, and supportive of a diverse and inclusive workforce. By doing so, we can foster a mental health profession that truly reflects the diversity of our communities and is better equipped to meet the increasing demand for vital mental health services.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to a thoughtful examination of this matter and the positive changes it could bring to the field.

