

PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY IN MICHIGAN: *Reject The Social Work Licensure Modernization Act*

Oppose House Bills 5184 & 5185

Summarized *Version*

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The SWLMA removes the examination requirement for social workers at all license levels. This legislation was created in response to the release of Association of Social Work Boards' (ASWB) 2022 Exam Pass Rate Analysis that demonstrates disparities in pass rates, which disproportionately affect people of color, as well as lower income individuals. While the findings of the ASWB data are concerning and require a thoughtful and holistic response, **removing the examination requirement from the social work licensing process would put the public at risk** and result in social work having the lowest licensing standards of all the mental health professions. **The Social Work Modernization Act is an impulsive and simplistic response to a complex issue and will result in dire consequences for Michiganders and social workers.**

"According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), **professional social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health services providers**. There are more clinically trained social workers—over 200,000—than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined". (NASW News)

Addressing institutional discrimination is a complex and ongoing process that involves both systemic and individual efforts. Eliminating the examination requirement completely in response to this data is a hasty response, an oversimplified "fix", and an unexamined solution.

The disparities between white test-takers and people of color appear to be greater for the ASWB Master's Examination than they are for the Clinical Examination (ASWB, 2022). The ASWB Master's Examination is not required for licensure in Michigan.

The disparities in pass rates for the ASWB Clinical Examination due to race appear to be decreasing. The analysis states, "first-time pass rates for white test-takers have remained relatively stable during the four-year period" and **"Black test-takers displayed some of the most significant growth in first-time pass rates, increasing 7 percent from 2018 to 2021"**. (ASWB, 2022)

The modifications proposed by **the SWLMA would shift the responsibility for evaluating readiness for licensure to professors, universities, and supervisors who carry their own biases, leading to continued**

discrimination within the assessment process. Universities do not assess an individual's cumulative knowledge across the wide-ranging content areas of social work, nor do they endorse an individual's readiness for independent practice.

The completion of required supervised practice is only affirmed through a signed form. The only current requirement for a social worker to provide clinical supervision is to hold a full social work license (currently "LMSW"). There are no mandated additional educational or training prerequisites for clinical supervisors and there exists a lack of standardization in the field of clinical supervision. A formalized process for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of such supervision is absent. Consequently, **there is a notable absence of mechanisms to guarantee that the clinical supervision being offered encompasses pertinent and comprehensive education and skill enhancement.**

There are other ways to address workforce shortages, such as incentivizing social work. **Sacrificing standards and quality to increase quantity is not what vulnerable individuals in Michigan need or deserve.** Safeguards and controls, such as the licensing examinations, decrease the likelihood of doing harm and promote public health and safety.

Despite the data suggesting that both the United States Medical Licensing Examinations ("Medical Board Exams") and The Uniform Bar Examination ("The Bar") may be discriminatory based on race, the requirement of licensing examinations remains part of the processes of becoming a practicing physician and lawyer in the United States because **it is essential that those entering these professions have a minimum level of competence and knowledge.** While specifics vary by state, the licensing process for the other mental health professions, including **psychologists, mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and professional counselors, require passing an examination.**

The Social Work Modernization Act would allow "social workers" to participate in the following high-stakes tasks without passing an examination to demonstrate a minimum level of competency and knowledge:

- working as mental health professionals (such as psychotherapists),
- providing mental health diagnoses,
- providing clinical supervision to social work trainees,
- participating in the processes and decisions of family court,
- assessing individuals at-risk of suicide or homicide,
- providing crisis intervention to those victim of human trafficking or domestic violence,
- de-escalating mental health crises,
- assessing court-ordered individuals and managing risk to the community,
- intervening in elder abuse,
- providing substance abuse treatment,
- assessing child abuse / neglect,
- and more.

The clinical licensing examination supports public health by requiring that clinical social workers have adequate knowledge about diagnosis, treatment planning, theoretical frameworks, de-escalation, crisis intervention, safety protocols, ethical decision-making, and more. In a statement, the ASWB committed to continuing to improve the examinations, "ASWB is committed to leading change in

collaboration with social work partner communities toward addressing the systemic and institutional factors that disproportionately affect Black licensure candidates and those of other historically marginalized groups. ASWB is actively seeking short- and long-term solutions” (ASWB, 2023).

Conclusion & Contact Information

An immediate and surface response to a complex problem poses danger to our clients and communities. We urge lawmakers, community members, healthcare professionals, behavioral health professionals, mental health professionals, and all who care about the well-being of Michiganders to oppose House Bill 5184 and House Bill 5185.

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References

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Support the Social Work Licensure Modernization Act - NASW MI. Voter Voice. (n.d.). <https://www.votervoice.net/NASWMI/Campaigns/107864/Respond>