

February 4, 2025

House Committee on Corporations
State House, Room 135
Providence, RI 02903


IN SUPPORT: House Bill 5158, Making Permanent Licensing Equity for Social Workers

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee on Corporations:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, RI Chapter (NASW-RI), we write to express our strong support for legislation, H5158, that is before your committee to make permanent the removal of the examination requirement for Master's level social workers (MSWs) who have graduated from a Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited school of social work. The legislation we are supporting would continue a policy that has been in place since the legislature passed a bill in 2022 removing the exam requirement. That bill had a sunset provision set to go into effect in August 2025. The goal is to remove the sunset with the passage of H5158 this session.

H5158 is important to NASW-RI because passage of the original bill allowed our state to introduce MSW social work graduates into the ranks of licensed social workers, while they work toward their LICSW, without another financial burden. The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), which is the testing vendor, released their pass rate data by demographic groups shortly after our RI bill passed into law, in August 2022. Their data show vast disparities in pass rates between Black and White test takers. Notably, White test takers passed for the first time nearly 90% of the time, while Black test takers passed for the first time only 51% of the time. The test at the LCSW level also had an impactful burden on older test takers and those whose first language is not English.

At NASW-RI, we recognize the problems inherently associated with high stakes exams at the entry level of licensure, the LCSW level. We want to ensure we are working together with allies to address and remove such barriers wherever they may exist. In addition, there has been a well-documented shortage of licensed social workers and other behavioral health providers in RI. Removing the examination at the LCSW level markedly increased the number of trained, licensed social workers available to provide needed and essential services. **Indeed, data from the RI state licensing board shows a 160% year-over-year increase in new LCSWs entering the field in the year after the test removal passed.**



It's important to note, we are advocating for the removal of the test at only the LCSW level. Masters level social workers are eligible for the LCSW upon graduation with their core supervision hours from a CSWE accredited school of social work. We do not believe the previously required high-stakes test proves competency or correlates to consumer protection, as there are no available data suggesting this. Also of note, we are not advocating for removal of the examination at the highest level of licensure, the independent practice LICSW level.

Rhode Island has been a leader in providing licensure equity in social work. After the bill passed in 2022, many other states followed suit including Connecticut and Colorado, among others. We are eager to work closely with you as we seek to advance H5158 in the 2025 legislative session.

Please reach out to us with any questions, comments, or concerns you may have. We hope you will lend your support. If you'd like to follow up further, please be in touch with Rebekah Gewirtz at this email address: rgewirtz.naswma@socialworkers.org.

Thank you very much for the work you do on behalf of the residents of Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Gewirtz

Rebekah Gewirtz
Executive Director
NASW-RI

Meredith Sinel

Meredith Sinel, LICSW
Board President
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