

March 12, 2024

Representative Tina Liebling  
 Chair, House Health Finance and Policy  
 477 State Office Building  
 St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for HF 3626

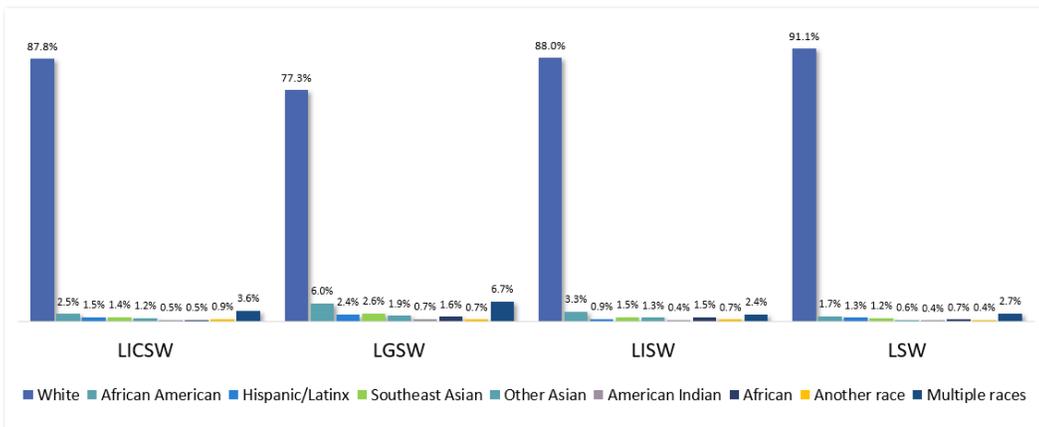
The Minnesota Board of Social Work writes in support of HF 3626. The Board’s mission is protecting the public through licensing and regulation of the social work profession. The Board has over 17,000 licensees with 4 different license types.

HF 3626 proposes changes to the Board’s provisional license statute. The provisional license was first implemented in August 2007 to address exam passage rate disparities among refugees and immigrants who are foreign born and communicate in English as a second language. Minnesota is the only state with this type of provisional license. With the provisional license, the Minnesota Board of Social Work demonstrated that regulation can address disparities in the licensing process and still protect the public.

The proposed legislative changes to the provisional license create an alternative pathway for individuals with social work education to obtain a social work license and a career in social work without passing a licensing exam. Individuals may choose the exam-based path to licensure, licensure by endorsement or the provisional license pathway. To ensure public protection, the proposed expanded provisional license maintains the requirement of 2000 hours of supervised practice and supervision hours with a board approved supervisor to ensure a social worker is practicing ethically and competently within their scope of practice.

The Board supports this legislative proposal as a method to increase diversity in the social work workforce. The Minnesota Department of Health Healthcare Workforce Survey found a lack of ethnic diversity among licensed social workers.

### Race and ethnicity of licensed social workers



Data source: MDH Healthcare Workforce Survey (social workers only), administered from February 2023 through February 2024.

The MDH Workforce Survey data also shows that licensed social workers of color are more likely to provide services to underrepresented communities. This legislative change could lead to decrease in access disparities for the community.

*“Which of the following underserved patient groups do you serve on a **daily basis**, if any? (Check all that apply.)”*

**All social workers (licensing groups combined)**

Patient Group	White providers	Providers of color
Immigrants/refugees	14.2%	<b>27.6%</b>
Other racial or ethnic minority group members	31.3%	<b>43.5%</b>
Low-income or uninsured patients	35.8%	<b>41.1%</b>
Medicaid, MinnesotaCare, or other Minnesota health care program recipients	36.4%	36.1%
Patients who require an interpreter	13.7%	<b>20.7%</b>
Veterans	13.3%	13.2%
Populations with disabilities	31.2%	30.7%
Unsure	1.3%	1.5%
None of these	2.2%	1.1%

Data source: MDH Workforce Survey, 2022-2024

The Board of Social Work supports HF 3626 and asks the committee members to support the statutory changes for provisional licensure. The proposed changes protect the public and improve access to quality social work care by creating an alternative pathway to a social work license, which will increase the size and diversity of the social work workforce.

Thank-you for considering HF 3626. If you have any questions, please call or email me at [youa.yang@state.mn.us](mailto:youa.yang@state.mn.us) or 612-617-2110.

Sincerely,



Youa Yang, LICSW  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Board of Social Work

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Written Testimony of Carl Hokanson, LGSW  
House Committee on Health Finance and Policy  
Testifying in opposition to HF 3626

March 12, 2024

Representative Liebling, Representative Bierman, and Respected Members of the House Committee on Health Finance and Policy:

My name is Carl Hokanson. I am writing in opposition to HF 3626. I am licensed in Minnesota as a Licensed Graduate Social Worker. I worked for most of my 20-year social work career as Director of Social Services for the transitional care unit of Regions Hospital.

I became involved in the ASWB examination program in 2007 when I began writing questions for the exam. Later I was on the ASWB Examination Committee and was a cochair of the committee. In 2020, I was hired by ASWB to direct the development of the exam.

I am one of several Minnesota social workers who are actively working on the development of the social work licensing exams. Minnesotans are involved in all aspects, from question writing to consulting, and as members of the Exam Committee, which reviews all questions before they are used on an exam.

As director of the examination development program, I can assure the committee that development of the social work licensing exams follows the same standards and protocols as the exam programs for other professions, including nursing, psychology, law, and medicine. We incorporate sensitivity and anti-bias screening into every step of our exam development process and our psychometricians closely monitor all our questions using statistical analyses. If statistics show that one demographic group answers a question differently during the question pilot phase, the question is not used on a scored exam. ASWB's processes meet — and often exceed — standards set by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education for fairness in testing.

As the only objective measures of competence used in professional social work regulation, the social work licensing exams are essential for public protection. Removing the exam requirement and adding more supervision hours will add subjectivity to the process and may lead to disparities in access to supervisors, increased costs related to supervision, and subjective ratings

from supervisors who have no standard protocols to follow. Removing the exam requirement **increases** potential for bias in the licensure process.

Pass rate disparities result from historical societal inequities in our country. The exam is just a measurement instrument that reveals these inequities.

As a social worker licensed in Minnesota who has worked alongside many other Minnesota social workers in the development of the social work licensing exams, I oppose HF 3626.

Thank you for your time,

*Carl Hokanson, MSW, LGSW*

Carl Hokanson, MSW, LGSW  
ASWB Director of Examination Development

Chair Liebling, Vice Chair Bierman, and Committee Members,

I am Thomas Brooks, a current board member and former chair of the Minnesota Board of Social Work. I am writing to express my support for HF 3626 to expand the provisional license for social workers in our state. As a member of the board who unanimously approved this bill, I am so proud of the journey our board and staff have been on over the last several years to get to this point today. As the needs of our communities across the state have evolved, the need for social workers has evolved. As our communities have become more diverse, the need for social workers, particularly of color, has also increased.

Unfortunately, a barrier to licensure, and ultimately employment, has stood for far too long. Throughout our board's journey to get here today we have consulted with members of the public, partners in social work, held discussions and listening sessions in Minnesota and at the national level, and reviewed data provided by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) which shows significant disparities for social work candidates of color and those of older tenure. Our board has heard from social work leaders in our state who are having trouble recruiting and retaining social workers of color because of the pass/fail rates of the ASWB exam, even after several costly attempts. These are educated, highly qualified and performing social workers who are not able to attain and retain the employment we desperately need to lift up our communities across Minnesota.

Change is never easy and we know as large as the system is supporting and surrounding social work, more work will be needed to continue to expand access to quality social work and mental health services for our youth and families across the state. The board is fully committed to continue partnership with NASW and other partners in our state to improve access to the profession and quality of care for the public. We stand committed to our board staff, regulatory community, our relationship with social work licensees, and our ability to continue licensing and providing compliance services on behalf of the public we are sworn to protect. We have found significant value in formal education, continuing education, supervision, peer mentorship, and real-world experience as a social worker.

As a former volunteer and board member of ASWB, I hope we can all continue discussions with them and other social work leaders across the country, but doing the right thing should not be held because a private organization's revenue is on the line. We have an opportunity in our state to lead boldly and make a change that directly and immediately impacts the livelihoods of new and returning social workers and the communities we need them to serve. Let's start somewhere. I ask for your support on HF 3626 to expand the provisional license for social workers in Minnesota to increase options for licensure and employment access in our state.

Thank you,  
Thomas Brooks – [Thomas.h.brooks@state.mn.us](mailto:Thomas.h.brooks@state.mn.us)

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Written Testimony of Lavina G. Harless, LCSW  
House Committee on Health Finance and Policy  
Testifying in opposition to HF 3626

March 12, 2024

Representative Liebling, Representative Bierman, and Respected Members of the House Committee on Health Finance and Policy:

My name is Lavina Harless. I am writing in opposition to HF 3626.

I am a licensed clinical social worker in Virginia and have worked in and overseen the development and administration of the social work licensing examinations for 19 years.

As a social worker, I am committed to the values of our profession, and I stand by the integrity of the ASWB examination program. I can attest to the active involvement of 20 Minnesota social workers during my time at ASWB. Minnesota has been represented in every step of the process of developing valid, reliable, and fair assessments of entry-level competence for social workers. We appreciate the dedicated and committed involvement of the Minnesota Board of Social Work, an exemplary member of the Association of Social Work Boards.

Maintaining the licensing exam is essential to ensuring that social workers possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to practice safely and ethically at entry to practice, thus protecting consumers in Minnesota. Removing the exam requirement risks allowing underqualified individuals into the profession, potentially compromising vulnerable clients. Without a competence assessment, qualifications may vary widely and lead to inconsistencies in the provision of quality of social work services.

While it is true that certain populations have lower pass rates on the competence assessments, we assert that the societal issues that are revealed in the pass rate data, disproportionately affecting some demographic groups, must be addressed by the entire social work community. ASWB calls on the profession to collaborate to address inequitable access to advantages, including high-quality educational opportunities.

The role of ASWB in this collaborative effort is to increase inclusion as we continue our work. ASWB is actively listening to the community and gathering input on short- and long-term solutions. We are already taking actions to enhance our exam development process by including additional voices in the process. ASWB has committed to:

- Listening to educators and practitioners representing diverse voices through the Social Work Workforce Coalition and the Practice Analysis Task Force to learn ways to improve the exams
- Conducting a series of Community Conversations so social workers can participate in qualitative research on their experiences

- Launching the Social Work Census as the largest and most inclusive analysis of social work practice and workforce study ever conducted
- Funding research initiatives to help the profession understand more about how competence is best defined and measured
- Offering a suite of free resources to help social work educators equally prepare students for the exams
- Increasing equitable access through:
  - Providing unsuccessful test-takers with free access to the Test Mastery Mindset program
  - Planning an option for secure, remote online proctoring
  - Establishing a scholarship fund for repeat test-takers
  - Exploring the potential for adding new assessment formats

As social work regulators, the members of ASWB believe in the importance of practice mobility. With the Council of State Governments' release of the final language for social work licensing compact legislation, we are now one step closer to increased public access to social work services. The licensing exam requirement in the compact legislation is a critical component of the uniform standards necessary for broad state participation. The exam is the only objective measure available to regulators that offers assurance that social workers licensed elsewhere are competent to practice in their jurisdiction. Because of this consideration, compact legislation for all professions typically requires an exam as a key feature.

While we must all work toward equity in the licensing process, removal of the exam requirement would be a hasty action that has the potential for unintended consequences for the profession and for clients and client systems.

I urge the committee not to move HF 3626 forward without further thoughtful consideration of the issues that may stem from complete removal of the profession's only objective competence measure.

Thank you,



Lavina Harless, LCSW  
ASWB Senior Director of Examination Services



Representative Tina Liebling, Chair  
Health Finance and Policy Committee  
March 13, 2024

Chair Liebling and Health Finance and Policy Committee Members,

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter (NASW-MN) and the MN Coalition of Licensed Social Workers (Coalition), we are writing to support the main ideas in HF3626, a bill that will expand the provisional licensing pathway for social workers.

NASW-MN is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in our state and the Coalition includes the MN Association of Black Social Workers, the MN Hmong Social Workers' Coalition, the MN Nursing Home Social Workers Association, the MN School Social Workers Association, and the MN Society for Clinical Social Work. Collectively we represent over 3,000 social workers.

Our members believe that social workers make important contributions to the workforce in many different settings, and we need more of them. Right now, the only licensure path open to most graduates includes passing an exam.

It's been shown that this exam is not fair for everyone. In 2022 Association of Social Work Boards, or the entity that develops the national exam, released data confirming disparate pass rates based on race and age. Other barriers include offering the test in English only, and a difficult approval process for the sorts of testing accommodations that are common in other test settings. There are also limited testing sites, making access in greater MN more difficult.

In MN there is another pathway to become licensed through additional supervision instead of passing the exam, but that is currently only open to a small group of people. We want to expand eligibility for this provisional pathway to all social work graduates.

The A24 amendment comes from HF3963 and maintains the supervision hours currently required instead of increasing them. This is important because social workers can not always find a qualified supervisor with their employer. To address that problem, it is common for social workers to pay out of pocket – anywhere between \$30-\$125/hour. Social workers are underpaid, and adding 12.5 more hours could cost a new social worker over \$1500.

Because there are MN social workers who already entered the profession through provisional licensing, we know this is effective in developing competent social workers. Social workers have a robust training and licensing process in MN that is separate from an exam. HF3626, amended to include components of HF3963, will allow new social work graduates some flexibility to choose a licensing path that best matches their professional needs and goals so they can join the workforce.

We appreciate your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Coalition of Licensed Social Workers Representatives:

Karen Goodenough, PhD, LGSW, National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter

Renita Wilson, MSW, LICSW, MN Association of Black Social Workers

Kao Nou Moua, PhD, MSW, LGSW, MN Hmong Social Workers' Coalition,

Joanna Genovese-Cairns, MSW, LISW, MN Nursing Home Social Workers Association

Julie Campanelli, LICSW, Ed.S, MN School Social Workers Association

James Stoltz, LICSW, LADC, MN Society for Clinical Social Work



March 13, 2024  
House Health Finance & Policy Committee

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUPPORTING HF3626 FROM NICOLE HELLAND, SOCIAL WORK  
MANAGER AT CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA**

Chair Liebling and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony to express Children's Minnesota's support for HF3626, a bill that would remove barriers to hiring qualified social workers that represent the communities we serve.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric healthcare system, serving an incredibly diverse patient population. We employ more than 5,000 people, including nearly 90 clinical social workers supporting our emergency departments, medical units, Inpatient Mental Health, Partial Hospitalization, pediatric clinics and outpatient therapy teams. These clinical social workers are dedicated to ensuring that Minnesota children can get the care they need in an environment where they feel seen and included. An essential part of creating this environment is recruiting and retaining staff that reflect the communities our patients and their families identify with. Currently, one quarter of Children's Minnesota employees are people of color, and our goal is to increase that to 34% in 2024.

Right now, we have 15 open positions seeking LGSW or LICSW candidates and current provisional license eligibility requirements, as well as demonstrated bias within the ASWB exam, continue to limit our ability to recruit internal and external candidates. In recent years, we have offered positions to internal candidates who identify as people of color and have demonstrated many years of dedicated employment at Children's, one as a unit coordinator and another as a nursing assistant. They completed the educational requirements and internship hours to join our social work team but have been unable to pass the ASWB exam despite taking it multiple times. These women include those that represent underserved populations and have multilingual skills that would greatly improve our patient care experience and enhance our care team. They were ready and willing to help in addressing the need for additional clinical providers for acute mental health including difficult to fill evening and night shifts, but we have been unable to hire them.

As a teaching hospital, we have a strong social work internship program, and we know that hiring clinical interns following their placement is the optimal way to support workforce stability. I recently learned that one of our interns did not pass their ASWB exam, preventing them from being hired into one of our critical open roles upon graduation.

Barriers like these have also threatened our ability to retain employees and offer opportunities for advancement and leadership, which is key to creating a truly equitable work environment. Recently we celebrated an employee passing the ASWB exam to obtain her independent clinical license. Then the employee, who also identifies as a person of color, shared with me that it was the fourth time she had taken the exam which meant she had to bear the burden of multiple exam fees, promotional delay and lost income.

The burden of the exam, both emotional and financial, has prevented too many qualified social workers from beginning or advancing the careers they have trained for and it has impacted our ability to effectively and efficiently serve our community. To address the health care workforce shortage we are seeing in Minnesota, more needs to be done to make our systems and processes more equitable. The changes outlined in this bill are the kinds of innovative and necessary changes that need to be made to recruit and retain the workforce that our patient families need, both today and in the future.

Nicole Helland, LICSW  
Social Work Manager  
Children's Minnesota

**Social Work License Reform**  
**HF3963/SF3880 & HF3626/SF3691**



### The Issue

- Social workers seek to diversify and expand our workforce.
- Social workers have a robust training and licensing process that includes:
  - ⇒ A degree from an accredited social work program that includes a supervised internship.
  - ⇒ Supervision in the first 4000 hours of practice with additional hours required for clinical social workers.
  - ⇒ Continuing education expectations.
  - ⇒ Accountability with a code of ethics and licensing regulation.
- The ASWB licensing exam is not the strongest measure of competency and creates unnecessary barriers.
- ASWB pass rate data demonstrates disparate passage rates based on race and age, leading to a broader discussion about the role of this multiple choice exam in measuring competency. It also highlights barriers for those who need physical, language, or other testing accommodations.\*\*
- There are limited testing sites in MN, making it less accessible for greater MN residents and those without transportation.
- Utah, Rhode Island, and Illinois have eliminated or suspended non-clinical exam requirements.\*
- Other fields in MN, including law and teaching, are modifying or exploring license pathways.

### Social Work Licensure Fast Facts

- MN passed *licensing regulations* for social workers in 1987. It is found in chapter 148E in statute.
- There are *4 levels of social work licenses*, determined by education level and supervision:
  - ⇒ Licensed Social Worker (LSW)
  - ⇒ Licensed Graduate Social Worker (LGSW)
  - ⇒ Licensed Independent Social Worker (LISW)
  - ⇒ Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW)
- MN was the first state to create an alternative pathway to licensure that does not include passing an exam. *This provisional license is currently available* to those born in a different country and speaking English as a second language.
- MN Board of Social Work (BOSW) regulates the social work profession.
- The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) develops and administers license exams.
  - ⇒ ASWB is a non-profit whose primary source of revenue comes from exam fees. Social work graduates paid over \$17.6 million to ASWB in 2021 in exam fees.#
- The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredits higher education social work programs.

### The Proposal

- Expand the existing non-exam route (provisional licenses) eligibility, allowing extra supervision in lieu of the exam. Eliminate prerequisites to make this pathway optional for all social work graduates.

\*Utah HB250; RI Title 216, Chapter 40, Subchapter 05, Part 7; NASW-IL, Licensure Steps  
#ASWB 2021 Annual Report  
\*\*2022 Exam Pass Rate Analysis, Association of Social Work Boards

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Written Testimony of Stacey Hardy-Chandler, Ph.D., JD, LCSW  
House Committee on Health Finance and Policy  
Testifying in opposition to HF 3626

March 12, 2024

Representative Liebling, Representative Bierman, and Respected Members of the House Committee on Health Finance and Policy:

My name is Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler, and I am proud to offer this written testimony as a black woman, a licensed clinical social worker, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB).

Like other professional healthcare associations in fields such as medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and physical therapy, ASWB shepherds the administration of the licensing examinations and provides its member boards with an array of other resources and services to relieve some of their governmental burdens. It is because of the integrity of our work on behalf of our member boards that I must oppose HF3626.

### Who Is ASWB?

ASWB is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the social work regulatory community. We were formed when several boards joined together to address common needs – including the goal of a uniform, objective process for minimum competence measurement. On behalf of the 64 member boards we serve throughout the United States and Canada, we exist to support regulatory bodies including the Minnesota Board of Social Work.

As with other healthcare regulatory associations, our mission is accountability and assuring the public's trust and confidence through the promotion of professional standards. Our work ensures that the Minnesota Board of Social Work has access to the data and tools to help meet their mandated responsibilities in providing oversight for the practice of social work in the state.

### Anti-Bias Measures

Professional licensure examinations for social work require strict adherence to the same professional standards across all health and human service professions, including those of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and physical therapy. ASWB follows practices set forth in "The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing" which represents the gold standard in guidance on testing in not only the United States but many other countries, as well. These standards require multiple layers of anti-bias measures.

ASWB guards against bias in every step of exam development:

- Reaching out to representative demographics across the profession when conducting the analysis of the practice, used as the basis for the exams;
- Recruiting a diverse group of practicing social workers to serve as item writers and Examination Committee members, reflecting the diversity of the profession;

- Subjecting each exam question to DIF (differential item functioning) analysis, a psychometric process that shows whether test-takers from different backgrounds perform differently on each question;
- Removing any questions showing DIF from the exams before they are ever used as a scored item;
- Editing all questions for simplicity and straightforward language to eliminate jargon as much as possible;
- Ensuring readability of ASWB exams, keeping the language written at about a 10th grade level, less challenging than standard social work texts used in BSW and MSW programs.

## **Detrimental Impact**

ASWB has concerns about the option to issue a license without the requirement of passing a licensure exam – *for social work alone and no other profession* – as permitted by this proposed legislation. In addition to creating a dangerous precedent for other licensed professionals, broadening the provisional license as proposed would have significant detrimental long-term impacts for our profession for two critical reasons. First, it muddies what the public is entitled to expect in working with someone with the title “licensed clinical social worker.” We owe the public consistency and clarity.

The second and more disturbing concern is that people of color will be overrepresented among those taking the provisional path, thereby perpetuating some of the very disadvantages the bill proposes to remedy. This bill fails to consider social workers in the military, working in federal roles like the Veterans Administration or those wanting to pursue licensure through the multi-state compact which will require a uniform, valid, and reliable measure of competence as provided through the professional licensure examinations for hiring or certain promotional opportunities.

## **The workforce is the right *topic*, but the exams are the wrong *target*.**

Disparities in pass rates are the result of deep and complex systemic and institutional factors. Removal of the exam, even for the provisional license, targets a valid measure of these disparities, but it completely ignores the root causes.

We find common ground in that social work and those served by social workers benefit from a diverse and inclusive workforce. It is in this spirit that ASWB respectfully asks that the committee support profession-wide collaboration among educators, regulators, and advocates, which would have a more positive and longer-lasting impact on the profession’s workforce and those who social workers serve. It is my hope ASWB can work alongside the Board of Social Work and peer organizations to support even more social workers in finding success on their paths to licensure, and continued success throughout their careers. We welcome the opportunity to work in collaboration to address and resolve concerns for the best possible outcome – for the profession and for all residents of Minnesota.

Thank you for your time and consideration. On behalf of ASWB, I am happy to make myself available to this committee to provide further information about regulation’s commitments to the public.

Respectfully submitted,



Stacey Hardy-Chandler, Ph.D., JD, LCSW  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Social Work Boards

**Social Work License Reform**  
**HF3963/SF3880 & HF3626/SF3691**



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