
NATE GUSTAFSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 1053

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Wednesday, January 7, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Snyder, and esteemed members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for scheduling this public hearing and providing me with the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 1053. I also want to express my appreciation to my colleague, Senator Carpenter, for leading this bill in the Senate.

Every area of Wisconsin life has been decimated by the current workforce shortage, none more so those who need help from social workers, especially in rural communities. This has been exacerbated by the concerning number of qualified graduates that have found the national test, a test that has no proof of effectiveness, too onerous to pass.

In lieu of a test, this bill creates an alternative pathway to obtain social work credentials through the use of an apprenticeship program. This allows those who do not excel at the national test the ability to get on the job training that is infinitely more beneficial than any test prep could provide. This pathway has all the safeguards in place requested by the social workers. This bill is easy, it makes sense, and can fix a dire problem in this state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

TIM CARPENTER

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February 7, 2023

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Testimony on Assembly Bill 1053

Thank you Representative Snyder and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 1053. This legislation provides an alternative pathway for Wisconsinites pursuing the career of Social Worker to obtain their professional credential without passage of a national examination.

Applicants who have not passed the national examination, but have passed the state jurisprudence exam, would be able to obtain a non-renewable provisional license that would allow them to work as social workers under supervision following requirements established by the social worker section of the Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling, and Social Work Examining Board (MPSW). The provisional certificate or license holder would complete 2,000 hours of supervised social work practice. Upon completion of that supervised practice, the supervisor shall submit to the MPSW an evaluation of the applicant's performance, attesting to their ability to practice social work competently and ethically.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has expressed opposition to the national Association of Social Work Boards' licensing exams in light of data indicating disparities in success rates for prospective social workers of color, older adults, those who speak English as a second language, or are Deaf or hard of hearing. Innovative solutions intended to strengthen competency and increase diversity of the social work profession can expand Wisconsin's social worker workforce and reverse the growing shortage of social workers that exists across Wisconsin.

Assembly Bill 1053 provides just that type of innovative solution, creating options for Wisconsinites who are seeking to serve our communities in the important area of social work, while ensuring that they are prepared to practice competently and ethically.

Thank you for holding this hearing, and your consideration of Assembly Bill 1053.

NASW WI TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF ASSEMBLY BILL 1053 BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ON FEBRUARY 7, 2024

Chairperson Snyder and members of the Assembly Committee on Children & Families

I am pleased to speak in support of Assembly Bill 1053, the Alternative to Licensure Exam bill. The bill would allow social work BSW and MSW graduates who fail the national exam to obtain a three-year non-renewable social work credential that would enable them to work as a social worker under supervision. After 2,000 hours of supervised practice, with the support of their supervisor, the applicant could obtain a regular social work credential.

A year and a half ago, the Association of Social Work Boards, the national organization that oversees the national social work exam, published a study that revealed major disparities in the pass rate of the exam between those for whom English is their second language and native English speakers, those generally from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and those under 30 versus returning students over 50.

At the same time, over the last several years I have spoken with a diverse group of applicants who, although they had obtained their social work degree and passed the state jurisprudence exam, could not pass the national social work multiple-choice exam. These individuals included a deaf and hard of hearing applicant who was fired from Rogers Memorial Hospital after failing the exam four times, a supervisor of Hmong social work graduates who said she knew at least five Hmong social work graduates who have not been able to pass the exam, several African-American applicants, including one working with juvenile offenders in Dane County and a young white applicant. Why are these individuals not passing the exam? It is not clear. For those for whom English is their second language, which includes deaf and hard of hearing individuals, the multiple-choice questions may require a very subtle understanding of English that is lost on them. The national ASWB exam is offered in English and French, but not Spanish, Hmong, American Sign Language or any other language.


For some of these applicants test anxiety may be the major factor causing them to fail the national exam. Whatever the reason for their failure, our profession is losing diverse culturally sensitive practitioners that we sorely need. With the current workforce shortage in Wisconsin, we cannot afford to lose these practitioners.

All these applicants have obtained their social work degree. They have passed out of the rigorous requirements of a professional social work program including methods classes and a field class. They have also passed the open book state jurisprudence exam, which tests their knowledge of state law impacting child abuse and neglect, adult protective services, alcohol and drug abuse services and ethical standards.

Assembly Bill 1053 is modeled after and expands upon a similar Minnesota law, designed to help Hmong and Somali social work graduates who failed the national social work exam.

I am happy to answer any questions at this time.

Marc Herstand, MSW CISW
Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers Wisconsin Chapter



TESTIMONY 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 1053
Relating to: provisional social worker certificates and licenses

Chairman Snyder and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families.

My name is Luka Schroeder. I am an intern at the National Association of Social Workers Wisconsin Chapter as well as an undergraduate social work student at UW-Whitewater.

Today, I will be speaking in support of Assembly Bill 1053 involving social worker certificates and licenses. As other people have mentioned in their testimonies, there are a lot of issues with the current way that social workers receive licenses, especially involving the licensure exams. I will leave it up to them to explain the statistics, but I would like to share my own story as a student. I am someone who has both ADHD and autism. These disabilities often make it harder for me to focus or understand what someone is saying than the average person. This does not mean that I am incapable of understanding what others say, but it is definitely something I have had to learn and improve on over time. In my first university, I was put on probation because I struggled with the way they formatted tests and taught information. Now in my current university after much experience with college assignments, I have a 3.9 GPA. I am also going onto my Master's in Social Work this summer. I have a good relationship with my professors, and I score well when I have to demonstrate my skills in action. I have worked hard to get to where I am now. I am both lucky in the fact that I have been able to find a learning method that works for me as well as a solid support system in my university. However, this is not the case for everyone, and it also might not be the case for me if I were to be scored mostly by exams.

I have taken exams before, but I have very rarely taken an exam which tests your skill in words. Similarly, I do not have much experience taking an exam that is 170 questions and four hours long. I am aware there are study guides for these exams, but many of us do not learn as well just reading from a book, myself included. What troubles me the most about our current licensing standards is that a person can put so much passion and effort and even money into a degree which seeks to help others, and they can even adequately demonstrate the ability to do so, but their capabilities are licensed primarily based on a multiple choice exam after the degree. Exams can sometimes be confusing, especially to people like me who take a long time to understand what the question is asking regardless of what subject it is on and how knowledgeable I am in that topic. Even with an open book test, sometimes I still get it wrong. Sometimes there are subtle hints at the right answer that I do not catch onto. Even if I ask a professor about the question after the test, I often find we come to an agreement that maybe this question was not worded the best for others or myself to understand. This is especially bound to happen with a diverse population who have many different learning styles and life experiences who learned to read a certain sequence of words differently from each other.

I think it is important to note that many social workers go into this field partially because we know what it is like to struggle. For example, I go into this field hoping to bring support to others with disabilities such as mine because I have lacked support myself. When people who have struggles fail this exam, they are prevented from helping others

with those same struggles. These communities lose social workers who understand them. They lose social workers who are determined to improve in their service over time. They can even lose access to any social worker at all. I believe this bill would be an improvement for social workers and the people we serve because it allows people who fail the license exam to learn and get better at what they do rather than to never practice. It also allows Wisconsin to close the gap between the people in need and the social workers who are able and willing to help them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here. I am happy to answer any questions.

Luka Schroeder

NASW-WI Intern

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February 7, 2024

TO: Assembly Committee on Children and Families

FROM: Mike Tierney, Legislative Liaison for the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services

RE: AB 1053 Relating to: provisional social worker certificates and licenses.

Chairperson Snyder and Committee members,

Thank you for holding this hearing today on Assembly Bill 1053.

The department appreciates and understands the goals of this legislation, but there are issues that exist in the bill as presently drafted.

Under the bill, there would be no distinction between a person who is issued a certificate or license under current law and individuals who upon completion of the provisional period, are issued a certificate or license as proposed in this bill.

At present, a certified or licensed Social Worker in our state can easily obtain single state licensure in other states as the need arises. Wisconsin licensure is considered a gold standard and persons who are credentialed here have passed the national exam. This exam is a licensure prerequisite in other states. Under this bill, we do not know how other states will react to a bifurcated system. Potentially, a Wisconsin Licensed Clinical Social Worker who wishes to apply in another state could be told by the other state that licensure via reciprocity is no longer an option and that they need to apply by examination. Or they could be told they need to reach out to the testing agency and have their results sent to the other state – thereby causing them licensure delay.

The Social Work Compact, presently under consideration by the legislature, requires the completion of a national exam. Again, this legislation as written will complicate matters for social workers seeking compact licensure if compact legislation were to be enacted.

It is likely that persons who are credentialed under the bill provisions will not be aware that they do not qualify for licensure by reciprocity or for licensure under a compact. This will then lead to an increased volume of contacts to the department from persons with questions. We would likely see an uptick in contacts from persons who accepted employment only to find out they need a reciprocal or compact credential. While we could assist them with information to take the national exam, we will not be able to otherwise assist them with a reciprocal or compact credential.

At present, the bill does not contain language that would allow the Board or Department to differentiate between the credentials issued upon completion of the national exam versus this legislation.

Under Wisconsin law, Boards attached to the department for limited purposes, under statute 15.03, are legally independent entities that have jurisdiction over the issuance of licenses. The Social Work section of the Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling and Social Work Examining Board is the entity that presently reviews and approves education and supervisors. This legislation increases the responsibilities of the Social Work Section significantly.

Boards are largely comprised of members of the profession. While Board members diligently perform their duties, our staff is also mindful of the fact that Board members also need to earn a living and, like anyone else, maintain a balance between work and life. Boards issue credentials and have regulatory control. We cannot issue Social Work credentials absent Board approvals. The wording of the bill presented today would add to the demands placed on Board members. This could, in turn, result in education and supervisor approvals for other applicants taking longer and may make it more difficult to attract and retain Board members.

In order to implement this legislation, the department would need to initiate rule making and emergency rule making projects across multiple chapters of MPSW administrative codes – amending some provisions while creating entirely new provisions. Since 2019, the rule making process takes an average of 30 months.

Software systems and forms for all social work credentials, with the possible exception of the Social Work Training Certificate, will need to be modified. Staffing levels in our department would also need to be adjusted to provide the Board with the additional administrative support for additional Board duties created under the bill.

Allowing the department to differentiate credentials under current law from those issued as a result of the bill is important. It would also ensure persons licensed via the national exam route would remain unaffected by this legislation in the event they seek reciprocal licensure or compact licensure would provide a pathway forward.

The department recognizes that questions have been raised about the efficacy and fairness of this exam but that a national alternative does not yet exist for impacted students. If we can account for many of the functional concerns discussed above it represents a positive alternative to ensuring competency. However if concerns are left unaddressed it could add significant additional complexity to an already complex process.

Thank you for your consideration.