



January 2025

Memorandum of Opposition

A.701 (Gonzales-Rojas/S. 988 (Brouk))

An Act to repeal paragraph (d) of subdivision 1 of section 7704 of the Education requiring applicants to pass an examination in order to qualify as a licensed master social worker.

The New York State Society for Clinical Social Work, Inc. (NYSSCSW) was founded in 1968 to address the need for legal recognition of social work clinicians practicing in all settings including private practice. This mission included scope of practice licensing and insurance reimbursement for mental health services. Among the notable achievements of the Clinical Society was the successful state and national legislative efforts to increase access to clinical social work mental health services through various public and private insurance systems. NYSSCSW initiated a licensing effort in 1985 which in 2002 New York State enacted, establishing the LCSW as well as the LMSW. NYSSCSW also collaborated with other clinical social work organizations to develop a psychotherapy-oriented Code of Ethics. NYSSCSW continues to be a leader in providing educational, professional and legislative services to its members as well as patient protection legislation.

We appreciate the attention to workforce issues, particularly to the availability of qualified professionals to provide competent mental health services. While there are several approaches which may incentivize and attract providers into the mental health fields, the New York State Society for Clinical Social Work is more concerned about the erosion of current standards which assure the highest quality of skills and competencies for all our licensed social workers, including the LMSW. Specifically, **we strongly oppose the elimination of the licensure examination for the master social worker license which is currently being proposed.** This examination not only assures a standard of skill acquisition for master level social workers immediately after graduation, but also serves to assure competencies at the higher licensed clinical social worker level. Elimination of the examination, we believe, would have grave consequences for both licenses.

Please consider the following issues:

- The MSW degree is considered the terminal degree in social work. The Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) is the accrediting body for this level of education. Although many social workers have doctorates in social work, the PhD/DSW programs are not currently within CSWE's purview.
- Unlike most graduate programs, there is no entrance exam required to apply to a MSW program, i.e. no GREs. Acceptance into social work graduate school is an open system, completely dependent on the discretion of the individual social work school. With no examination upon completion of the MSW, there is no measure of core competencies or beginning clinical skills which the licensing exam provides.

- The scope of practice for a Licensed Master Social Work in New York State is extraordinarily comprehensive, excluding only providing mental health services, i.e. Psychotherapy. It permits private practice with no supervision directly after graduation and passing the LMSW licensing exam.

S 7701. (a) The practice of licensed master social work shall mean the professional application of social work theory, principles and the methods to prevent, assess, evaluate, formulate and implement a plan of action based on client's needs and strengths, and intervene to address mental, social, emotional, behavioral, developmental, and addictive disorders, conditions and disabilities, and of the psychosocial aspects of illness and injury experienced by individuals, couples, families, groups, communities, organizations, and society.

The depth and breadth of these authorized practice activities must be measured to assure core competencies in each area to protect patients.

- For many MSW graduates the licensing exam is the first exam they have taken since graduation from college. This includes the BSWs (Bachelor in Social Work) who are granted an MSW with only an additional 30 credits in an MSW graduate program. Testing core competencies through an examination is a generally accepted approach and one adopted by most licensing laws.
- Many variables can influence failure to pass the MSW exam including inadequate past education skill building. When schools of social work embrace open enrollment, can they demonstrate evidence of reparative programs to build and support the necessary skills for critical thinking required for practicing successfully, and preparatory classes for passing a licensing exam to enter the profession?
- Finally, we would also bring to your attention what we view as a considerable problem with the quality of education for a Master's in Social Work: online learning or distance learning. There is a possible incongruence between teaching students the skills necessary to build empathetic relationships and conduct sophisticated biopsychosocial assessments and the lack of in-person contact required to develop these basic skills.

We recognize the importance of removing barriers to maintaining and expanding the social work workforce. We support reparative and preparatory tools for practice and passing the national LMSW and LCSW exams making sure that the exam itself is not imbedded with racial, ethnic or age-related disparities that contribute to differences in pass rates.

The Social Work profession has always defined itself in terms of its values, in this case diversity, equity and inclusion. **It's time to include practice competence as well.** The licensing exam allows the public the assurance that they are being assisted by a knowledgeable professional.

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