

Testimony of Paris Walker
Supporting
Social Work Licensure Modernization Act

Good morning,

My name is Paris Walker, and I am a resident of Sterling Heights, Michigan. I am currently employed as a Case Manager at Molina Health Care, working with the Medicaid and Medicare population. I stand in firm support of House Bills 5184 and 5185, Social Work Licensure Modernization Act.

Passing the master social worker clinical exam has proven to be a burdensome challenge. Despite multiple attempts, including seeking tutoring, investing in exam preparation applications and programs, and participating in social work study groups, I have not achieved success. From 2019 to 2023, I undertook the exam four times, and regrettably, each attempt ended in failure. As an individual of color in the field of social work, I have observed the exam's inherent racial bias and substantial flaws. According to data from aswb.org, between 2011 and 2021, only 28.2% of 1,582 African American first-time test-takers managed to pass, marking the lowest pass rate among all racial groups.

Currently, I hold a Master of Social Work Limited License, which I will be unable to renew in May 2024 due to the six-year license renewal timeframe. Failing to pass the exam imposes limitations on my employment prospects. Working as a case manager for the Medicare and Medicaid population at Molina Health Care for the past six years, has been a rewarding experience, I am eager to progress in my career. However, my inability to obtain full licensure has hindered my professional advancement. This biased exam does not truly reflect my competence, effectiveness, and dedication as a social worker. I have received education from an accredited school of social work, completed internships, and received supervision following graduation. I have eight years of social work experience, including roles as a case manager for the mental health population, therapist for juveniles, and a case manager for the Medicare and Medicaid population. During supervision, I received feedback that emphasized my qualifications, compassion, and my continual growth as a social worker. Nevertheless, this exam stands as a barrier to my success in my chosen field.

There is a concerning shortage of social workers for the mental health population, a demand that has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous social workers are prevented from securing employment at mental health agencies solely due to the lack of licensure. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics, particularly 1.01 Commitment to Clients, which states that social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of their clients. It is truly disheartening to consider that this exam dictates my ability to assist individuals, groups, and families in navigating the challenges of their daily lives.

This exam has not only affected me financially but has also taken a toll on my mental well-being. I have expended approximately \$1,700 on multiple exam attempts and exam preparation materials, negatively impacting my income. In June 2023, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, which worsened by life stressors and my repeated exam failures. However, my passion for the field of social work motivates me to fight for what is right and not give up. I am determined to advocate for both myself and my clients, which is why I urge you to vote in favor of House Bills 5184 and 5185, the Social Work Licensure Modernization Act.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to present my testimony.

Sincerely,

Paris Walker, LLMSW