



COLLEGE OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Catherine A. Macomber, PhD, LMSW
Assistant Dean – College of Health & Human Services
BSW Program Director
Professor in the Department of Social Work & Youth Services

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Testimony for the Social Work Licensure Modernization Act – HB 5184 & 5185
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On behalf of Saginaw Valley State University's accredited Social Work Programs, I am honored to speak in support of the Social Work Licensure Modernization Act – House Bills 5184 & 5185. My name is Cathy Macomber. I am a Social Worker, dually licensed in the State of Michigan in macro and clinical practice, and I serve as Assistant Dean in the College of Health & Human Services as well as the Director of the Bachelor of Social Work program at SVSU. SVSU provides both undergraduate and graduate programs in social work and graduates more than 130 professional social workers each year. The proposed legislation will allow these qualified individuals to serve the behavioral health needs of rural Michiganders in a timelier and more equitable manner.

Rural areas of Michigan are the most underserved in behavioral health: Our most recent graduates obtained the majority of their jobs in rural and medically underserved areas of Michigan. These are also the areas where our current cohort of students are engaged in educational placements. The proposed legislation will allow these new professionals and future graduates to provide needed behavioral health services quickly, addressing the critical workforce shortage.

I work closely with organizations like the Thumb Area Employer Led Collaborative and the Michigan Center for Rural Health. The lack of behavioral health providers in our rural and medically underserved communities is at a serious level. The current licensure system in Michigan is an impediment to hiring and retaining otherwise qualified professional social workers who can meet the needs of rural communities. In schools, Community Mental Health organizations, nursing homes, hospitals, and many, many other agencies and organizations, the need for licensed social workers is dire. While SVSU has a high passage rate for the current exam, we know that many of our graduates have been unsuccessful in passing the exam. This leaves them out of the workforce and unable to meet the desperate need.

Social Work is a profession of ethical and competency-based practice. The proposed legislation acknowledges this by removing an unethical and inequitable barrier to practice social work in our state. The legislation maintains the need for licensure and includes some of the most rigorous requirements for supervision and continuing education found in the United States.

Social workers are advocates. We advocate for others to reduce and eliminate disparity, inequality, and injustice. In 2022 we learned just how unfair the ASWB licensure exam is. Advocating to eliminate the exam as a requirement when we know it is inequitable and unfair is the only thing social workers, given our commitment to social justice, can possibly do. That is why I am here today speaking on behalf of myself, my profession, my alumni, and my current and future students.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.