

RE: S.F. 3691 Social worker provisional licensure modifications and recodifying

Health and Human Services Committee

Thursday, February 22, 2024, 8:30am

c/o anna.burke@mnsenate.gov

Dear Senator Melissa H. Wiklund and committee members,

I am a writing in support of S.F. 3691 Social worker provisional licensure modifications and recodifying. My name is Amber Robertson and I plan to be a social worker. I will be getting my license in 1 ½ years so this is an important issue to me. I am an adult learner, and this is my second degree. As I am sure you are aware, financial times are tough on society. Because I am a transfer student and working on my second degree, I do not qualify for many funds through FAFSA and as a result I am paying for much of my degree out of pocket with little help from federal or state loans through the FAFSA program. I am working hard towards my degree, and I am earning it every step of the way, both educationally and financially.

We need more social workers who can work with diverse populations. There is a shortage of social workers in Minnesota where the need for social workers is becoming greater and greater with poverty rates growing, the housing crisis looming as housing and rent prices increase each year, our aging population needing more support than ever, increased immigration, and the list goes on.

This bill, by removing the standardized exam requirement, will open doors for more social workers to become licensed social workers in the State of Minnesota. Without a state issued social work license, someone with a social work degree would not be able to practice social work in the state of Minnesota. This is an injustice as students spend tens of thousands of dollars on their degrees, yet, due to a culturally bias exam, they are unable to practice social work.

The Minnesota Social Work provisional license was created in 2007 to open doors to social workers who were foreign born and spoke English as a second language. Studies have shown that standardized exams are culturally biased as they are normed on one population early on, and test takers thereafter are measured against this initial group to which the exam is normed. The world is ever diversifying. People come with diverse lived experiences, different language capacities, and different worldviews. Using a standardized exam to screen out differences is an injustice.

A study by ASWB (The Assoc of Social Work Boards) in 2022 found that less than 70% of test test takers actually passed the exam, compared to 90% of white test takers who passed the same. Thi ss a huge discrepancy. The exam also costs between \$240-\$260. Test takers of color were taking this exam anywhere between 5 to 10 times. This is costly to test takers of color.

Asking test takers whose first language is not English and whom are foreign born to take the test first, and fail it before becoming licensed as a social worker, while knowing that less than 70% of test takers of color actually pass this national exam, is essentially codifying economic injustice into our statutes. It is essentially asking test takers of color to incur additional expenses in order to obtain their license when we already know that people of color are disproportionately concentrated in poverty and least likely to afford it.

I strongly support this bill and hope that you will decide to move the bill forward.

Sincerely,

Amber Robertson, BSW Student

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amber Robertson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Amber" being more prominent than the last name "Robertson".