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Written Testimony of Opposition to SF3691

Minnesota Health and Human Services Committee

February 21, 2024

Submitted by: Jennifer Henkel, LCSW

Chairperson Wiklun & Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Henkel. I am the Senior Director of Member Engagement and Regulatory Services with the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) which develops and administers licensure examinations, as well as providing support and services to regulatory entities in all 50 states and 4 U.S. territories. ASWB is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to social work regulation. Core to our mission is accountability and public protection through promoting safe, competent, and ethical social work practices.

I am submitting testimony in opposition to SF 3691 which makes changes to licensure requirements for all social workers. We have grave concerns about the option to issue a license without an examination as permitted by this bill.

Professional examinations provide information qualitatively different from a candidate's degree from school, and the two are not interchangeable. As with other healthcare professions, **social work licensure examinations are based on what those who actually work in real-world settings define as entry-to-practice knowledge, skills, and abilities.** These examinations are not academic capstones; they are post-graduate measures that complement information gleaned from applicants' educational backgrounds to make better decisions in support of strengthening public safety.

These examinations are the only part of license issuance decisions overseen by regulators themselves. Educational experiences vary greatly, even among accredited programs. Academic freedom, variations in programs, faculty composition, geographies, institutional resources, and many other factors mean that "satisfaction of degree requirements" means very different things among graduates. Some **schools of social work do not accept courses from other accredited schools, accept only limited credits from their own regions, or have an evaluation process** for transfers.

But no school of social work blanketly accepts courses from other accredited degree programs, so why should the regulatory community do so? Best practices dictate that regulators should directly oversee some component of that vital decision, as opposed to singular reliance on an external sector such as education to be the primary determiner of licensure approvals.

Professional examinations offer the only **continuously vetted, objective measure** of entry-to-practice competence in licensure issuance decisions. **They involve robust anti-bias measures and embed layers of checks and balances beyond anything available in degree-granting institutions.** The social work examinations are reliable, valid, and involve a psychometric process that follows industry standards, developed jointly with the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.

Social workers tend to serve the most vulnerable among us. This has such vast societal implications that the decision to issue a license to practice should at minimum include competency as measured by an objective industry standard. In line with the responsibility of regulated professions to uphold the public trust, **examinations complement education in helping verify minimum competency**. In addition to investigating complaints and upholding legal compliance, **verification of competency** is a core regulatory function.

At a time when equity is under scrutiny, changing the law to allow social workers to become licensed without taking an exam creates an inequitable licensing process. The alternative of extended supervision requirements as recommended in this bill may pose unintended consequences, creating an even more challenging barrier for licensure candidates to overcome. Supervision requirements pose significant financial, time, and resource burdens that should be carefully considered.

As social work regulators, the members of ASWB believe in the importance of practice mobility, affording licensed social workers the ability to practice in any state. With the Council of State Governments' release of the final language for social work licensing compact legislation, we are now one step closer to increased public access to social work services.

The **Social Work Licensure Compact allows eligible social workers to practice in all states that join** the compact. The goal is to eliminate barriers to practice and to client care while ensuring public protection. The Social Work Licensure Compact will also enhance public safety in every state, including Illinois.

In some way, all of us are accountable to the public. **Professional examinations factor solidly into public accountability** by offering a mechanism for telling the public something about the qualities and capacities of someone calling themselves a "professional social worker."

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jennifer Heubel".

Senior Director of Member Engagement and Regulatory Services
Association of Social Work Boards

ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.