

RE: S.F. 3691 Social worker provisional licensure modifications and recodifying
Health and Human Services Committee | c/o anna.burke@mnsenate.gov

Thursday, February 22, 2024

Dear Senator Melissa H. Wiklund and committee members,

I am writing in support of S.F. 3691 Social worker provisional licensure modifications and recodifying.

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 and salaries not catching up, our aging population needing more support than ever, 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. Competency can be ensured with supervision hours in order to ensure safety to the public. Supervision provides formative support to new social workers whereas a standardized exam acts as a barrier to students who won't be able to enter the field once they fail. Most social workers try to enter the field using the traditional route of taking the exam however, many social workers of color are having to take this costly exam several times. It is beneficial to pass the exam in order to be eligible for components of the profession such as transferring one's license to another state.

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 however, licensees needed to fail the exam first in order to apply for the provisional license.

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. 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 takers of color actually passed the exam, compared to 90% of white test takers who passed the exam. This is a huge discrepancy across ethnic groups. The exam also costs between \$240 (LSW)-\$260 (LICSW).

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 are least likely to afford it. We are barring future social work professionals from helping their communities when we are facing a shortage of social workers currently.

I strongly support this bill and its proposal to remove the exam requirement. I hope that you will decide to move the bill forward.

Sincerely,



Pa Der Vang, LICSW, Ph.D., MSW
Social Work Professor