

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
Testimony of Hannah A. Hudson on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
January 25, 2024

Supporting:
LD 1990, “An Act to Improve the Licensing Procedure for Certain Social Workers by Removing the Examination Requirement”

Sponsored by Speaker Talbot Ross

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, I am Hannah Hudson, Director of Policy at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization representing Maine's Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 80 service delivery sites around the State.

Community Health Centers are at the forefront of delivering care to rural and underserved Maine communities. They provide all patients with comprehensive primary care services, as well as a host of other services that include transportation, translation, and case management services, among others. They are further required to provide this care without regard to a patient's insurance status or ability to pay.

Maine's CHCs have long felt the impacts of primary care workforce shortages. Rural areas, in particular, are experiencing critical challenges with access to care. Some commonly identified issues specific to our CHCs are increased retirements due to an aging workforce; wage inflation and competition; difficulty hiring, recruiting, and retaining clinical and support staff; and a dire need for more primary care physicians, RNs, and behavioral health clinicians, including Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs).

LD 1990 proposes to eliminate the exam needed for Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates to obtain their conditional license (LMSW-cc). Members of our network have indicated that this legislation would positively impact hiring efforts by encouraging more applicants for open positions at CHCs and decreasing the administrative burden. One CHC shared that when they hired two new graduates, a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) and an LCSW, the current process was extremely stressful and led to lost work time – which means a negative financial impact on the CHC and less opportunities for patients to receive needed care. If conditional licensure were no longer mandatory to qualify for the LCSW exam, many CHCs would be more willing to hire new graduates in this discipline.

This legislation would also mitigate barriers to obtaining conditional licensing and improve access to licensure specifically for those where the greatest pass/fail disparities are observed. The Association of Social Work Boards analyzed test-taker performance from 2011 to 2021 across all five of the ASWB's exams, which are clinical, masters, bachelors, associate, and advanced generalist. The review found that “people who are white, female identifying, and young are significantly more likely to pass an ASWB

exam on their first try than are people of color, males, and those older than 30.”¹

MPCA supports LD 1990, and we thank Speaker Talbot Ross and the other co-sponsors for bringing this bill forward to support our workforce and offer a solution to a process that has created systemic inequities in this profession.

Thank you for considering our comments. MPCA and Maine’s Community Health Center Network are available for any follow up questions. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

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¹ <https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/Summer23p6.shtml>