

Testimony on SB 2357 North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers 18 February, 2025 House Industry Business and Labor Committee

Chairman Warrey and Members of the House Industry Business and Labor Committee,

The North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ND) respectfully opposes Senate Bill 2357. SB 2357 seeks to study the effectiveness of merging individual mental health boards into a single composite board. NASW-ND believes it would be more beneficial to provide a broader study with the goal of increasing efficiencies. An amended study could explore varying avenues to achieve efficiencies, such as making strategic investments in professional boards and reviewing partial composite boards.

The study could explore solutions through targeted investments in staffing, technology and administrative support. Solutions that support these areas could ultimately reduce licensure delays and modernize processes without compromising professional integrity.

Additionally, the study could explore other states board structures, like Illinois, that utilize a composite board for administrative purposes while still maintaining individual professional boards for issues that require specific knowledge – such as supervision or complaints.

Merging the boards has concerning, consequential risks for the various professions. Licensure decisions would be diluted, with fewer representatives speaking to the nuances of each profession. Board members would be burdened in their roles, requiring members to understand and enforce regulations across multiple complex disciplines. Ethical considerations would be generalized, rather than upheld within the specialized frameworks that have long ensured the highest standards of care. This study could impact the integrity of individual professions and create unintended consequences that weaken client protections and professional accountability.

Rather than dismantling well-functioning professional boards, NASW-ND recommends a broader study to analyze effective solutions, not a study that pushes the outcome in one direction. Such a study would seek to examine ways to resolve concerns around functionality, while maintaining the integrity of each profession.

NASW-ND believes in prioritizing public safety, maintaining professional standards, and the effective and timely access to mental health services. While we recommend a DO NOT PASS on SB 2357, we would support amendments broadening the scope of the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Muralt
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North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers