

**Senate Workforce Development Committee**  
**Testimony in Support of SB 2203**  
**February 15, 2023**

Chairman Wobbema & Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer Boeckel, and I am testifying today on behalf of the North Dakota Board of Social Work Examiners. As a representative of the board, I am here today to testify in favor of SB 2203.

The NDBSWE believes that the licensure of social workers is necessary and important for the profession of social work and to protect clients and client systems. However, after the recent data findings released by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) it has been clear that the licensing exam is not a reliable indicator of competence or aptitude. Rather, the examination data has revealed testing bias based on race/ethnicity, gender, and age (see Attachment 1).

After the data was released, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE; the national accrediting body for social work education) wrote a letter to each state board asking that the current and only licensing exam for social workers be “suspended until a thorough analysis can be completed that can suggest recommendations to correct inequalities.” It was suggested that in place of the current exam state licensing boards consider “students graduating from a CSWE-accredited program as the evidence of being competent.” This could be one approach to solving the national crisis we are facing. Accredited schools go through the rigorous process of demonstrating that they meet the accreditation set by both CSWE and the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

There are other options we have yet to fully consider (i.e. internships, supervision hours, continuing education, state written exams. What we are asking for is the ability to research ideas and options to ensure that we are licensing social workers in a manner that is best for both the profession and the state of North Dakota. Approving this bill does not change state law but rather it gives us the opportunity to bring about change in a timely manner, versus having to wait two years before we can address this work force issue.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2020 there were more than 715,000 social workers in the United States, with an expected growth of 12% by 2030. As it sits currently, the ASWB exam data shows that the exam itself is impeding the creation of a diverse health, behavioral health, and social service workforce. We are one of the fastest growing professions in the United States and a strong workforce is needed to meet this growing need here in North Dakota.

As a result of the national crisis that we find our profession in, the NDBSWE asks that we are given the opportunity to determine the licensing requirements necessary for North Dakota’s social workers. Our concern, if this goes unaddressed, is that we are not going to have enough North Dakota social work licensees to meet the growing demand for social workers.

To address this work force issue, we urge you to support SB 2033.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

ASWB reported cumulative data for years 2011-2021 stating, “Demographic pass rate trends by state/province largely mirrored the trends observed in the association’s 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis. Women tended to have higher pass rates than men, white test-takers tended to have higher pass rates than test-takers from other race/ethnicity groups, and test-takers in lower age categories (e.g., 18–29) tended to have higher pass rates than test-takers from higher age categories (e.g., 50 and older) across many states/provinces”. For North Dakota specifically the data shows similar patterns (see Table 1, 2 & 3).

Table 1. Number of test-takers & first-time pass rates (Bachelors exam) by demographic group 2011-2021

<b>State/Province</b>	<b># test-takers (overall)</b>		<b>Pass rate (overall)</b>
ND	1,085		79.4%
<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b># test-takers</b>	<b>Pass rate</b>
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	7	
	Black	21	47.6%
	Hispanic/Latino	13	69.2%
	Multiracial	18	88.9%
	Native American/Indigenous people	41	56.1%
	White	965	80.9%
Gender	Men	65	84.6%
	Women	1,020	79.1%
Age	18 – 29	815	79.4%
	30 – 39	158	83.5%
	40 – 49	78	78.2%
	50 and older	34	64.7%

Note: To protect the privacy of individual test-takers, results are not shown for groups where the number of test-takes is < 10.

Table 2. Number of test-takers & first-time pass rates (Masters exam) by demographic group 2011 - 2021

<b>State/Province</b>	<b># test-takers (overall)</b>		<b>Pass rate (overall)</b>
ND	501		87.0%
<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b># test-takers</b>	<b>Pass rate</b>
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	6	
	Black	14	57.1%
	Hispanic/Latino	14	64.3%
	Multiracial	12	75.0%
	Native American/Indigenous people	23	69.9%
	White	422	90.0%
Gender	Men	52	80.8%
	Women	449	87.8%
Age	18 – 29	212	87.3%
	30 – 39	171	87.7%
	40 – 49	81	85.2%
	50 and older	37	86.5%

Note: To protect the privacy of individual test-takers, results are not shown for groups where the number of test-takes is < 10.

Table 3. Number of test-takers & first-time pass rates (Clinical exam) by demographic group 2011 - 2021

<b>State/Province</b>	<b># test-takers (overall)</b>		<b>Pass rate (overall)</b>
ND	216		84.7%
<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b># test-takers</b>	<b>Pass rate</b>
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	1	
	Black	1	
	Hispanic/Latino	4	
	Multiracial	3	
	Native American/Indigenous people	6	
	White	199	85.9%
Gender	Men	21	81.0%
	Women	195	85.1%
Age	18 – 29	42	83.3%
	30 – 39	99	90.9%
	40 – 49	48	79.2%
	50 and older	27	74.1%

Note: To protect the privacy of individual test-takers, results are not shown for groups where the number of test-takes is < 10.