

NADD TASK FORCE ON LICENSURE REFORM – UPDATE APRIL 2024

Co-Chairs: Sheryl Kubiak (MI), Goutham Menon (IL), & Luis Torres-Hostos (TX)

Current Task Force Members*: Sally Backman (PA); Melissa Begg (NY); Joan Blakey (MN); Catherine Gayle (GA); Kristi Law (IA); Jackie Mondros (NY); Jayashree Nimmagadda (RI); Judy Postmus (MD); Tonya Rickles (KS); and Johanna Thomas (AR).

*Note: This current configuration is new since October 2023 as membership was reconstituted since several folks stepped off from their leadership positions. Gratefully many remain to offer continuity to the Task Force.

Three Sub-committees: **1)** Alternative Pathways for Licensure; **2)** Toolkit for Advocacy; and **3)** Dissemination

Background

- For at least the last 12 years, social workers have suspected that social workers of color, particularly Black and Latinx graduates, were failing the licensing exam at disproportionate rates.
- Working with the National Association of Social Work Deans and Directors (NADD), the NYS Deans used the data available to study their graduates and found racial disparities. In 2014, NADD began to strongly request that ASWB release data on pass/fail rates by age and race. A similar study conducted in MI that replicated NY, found similar results in 2021. Finally, in 2022, ASWB published a trend analysis of data from 2011-2021.
- The data showed significant disparities between white graduates and graduates who are Black and Latinx graduates. Additionally, older vs. younger grads and those for whom English as their second language.
- When pass rates are compared to other licensed professions where data exists (education, nursing, law, medicine), they have smaller disparities than social work.
- Licensure is more than an exam, and there is no evidence that passing an exam is an indication of one's ability to practice social work (*i.e., In MI, 1/3 of practicing social workers have never taken an exam*).
- A recent study compared AI research to the exam's questions and found that items did not even match the social work literature's best practices. [AI Analyzes the Social Work Licensing Exam, Concerns Deepen](#).
- In effect, the very principle of licensure – to protect the public by ensuring that social workers are competent to practice – is being undercut by an exam that results in great racial disparities.
- The larger context is the dearth of the social work workforce: The country needs a strong and diverse social work workforce.

The NADD Task Force on Licensure Reform (TFRL)

- **The NADD initiative is strongly supportive of SW licensure;** rather it is focused on the issue of the ASWB exam that has been shown to be flawed and inequitable.
 - We do not argue against licensing. We believe in protecting the integrity of the profession. The schools of social work are vital in gatekeeping as they are required to deliver curriculum based on social work competencies and ensure that students have met those competencies.
 - There is no evidence that the exam reflects a social worker's competence or effectiveness. Researchers with expertise in test methodology and the validity of testing have shown the exam's inadequacies. <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/3cxdy/>
- Task Force members were able to meet with leaders of NADD, CSWE and NASW in April 2023. Another meeting, including ASWB, was held at APM in October, 2023.
- The **Alternative Licensure Pathways sub-committee** explores other options to achieve a licensed workforce that meets competencies of the profession. Details are available on the website: [socialwork.one](#).
- The **Toolkit for Advocacy sub-committee** is maintaining a resource site that will help states who are exploring alternative approaches through the legislative process. Visit: [socialwork.one](#).

- The **Dissemination sub-committee** is designing a series of video materials to engage those learning about social work licensure and/or interested in pursuing advocacy within their state to promote equitable and inclusive licensing legislation.

Highlighted Data of Alternative Pathways to Licensure:

- Illinois **increased its workforce by 10,000 Licensed Social Workers (LSW)** between December 2021 (one month prior to implementation of new legislation not requiring exam) and December 2023.
- Since June 2022 (when amendments to licensure statute removed exam requirement) Rhode Island has **tripled the number of Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW)**.

In Conclusion:

- NADD strongly supports credentialing/licensure, but is opposed to the use of current exams which have limited and inadequate empirical evidence.
- Schools are not going “to teach to the test” (as the public complaint by ASWB against schools suggests). Schools develop curricula and programs that are required to meet CSWE-accreditation standards.
- NADD would like ASWB data that provides the number of times a person has taken the exam – as well as by how many ‘points’ someone has failed the exam by (what is the range: 1-5 points; 6-10 points, etc.). Anecdotally, educators know that often candidates are failing the exam by 1-5 points.
- In the interim: ASWB begins to implement now a process where when a test-taker passes a particular module, they do not have to take that module again. When a test is retaken, that person only retakes the parts they did not pass.
- Consider a one-time fee for the exam.
- Recognize the trauma and personal pain that successful graduates of CSWE-accredited programs experience when they continue to spend money on exams, and then may not be able to practice.
- NADD continues to seek collaboration with CSWE, NASW, and other groups to work with us to ensure there is equity and fairness for our students who are our future workforce.

Opportunities for Action:

- ***Become involved!*** Are you interesting in joining this work? It’s our collective responsibility. **Goutham Menon (gmenon@luc.edu)** or **Luis Torres-Hostos (luis.torreshostos@utrgv.edu)** are connecting with all interested in TFRL.
- ***Invite a mentee or colleague.*** TFRL is expanding membership, *even beyond deans, directors, and chairs*. If you know someone who may be interested and a complement this work, encourage them to reach out.
- ***Share your state’s story.*** TFRL is sensitive to that fact that some member schools are in states which are struggling to gather and catalyze stakeholders around these inequity concerns. If you reside in one of these states, please reach out to share struggles and concerns for support and ally-ship. **Please contact Goutham Menon (gmenon@luc.edu)** or **Luis Torres-Hostos (luis.torreshostos@utrgv.edu)**.
- ***Educate yourself.*** Visit the TFRL website (socialwork.one), review the content, and add yourself to the newsletter list. Then, share the resource with at least ONE colleague, student, or fellow social worker, and encourage them to do the same!
- ***Engage in training.*** Keep your eye out for the upcoming video tutorials/webinars. Make a commitment to viewing them and sharing them. One idea: when released, prioritize watching one per month. Then, share it with a colleague at another social work program, integrate it into a course, or mention it on social media.
- ***Share your expertise.*** Have you engaged in advocacy within your state regarding social work licensure reform? Are you willing to share your knowledge/expertise, your experience, and/or connect TFRL with others? TFRL would like to learn from those who have direct involvement with advocacy and integrate experiences of these individuals into resources. This includes test-takers who have been impacted by the current exam and would like to share their story. **Please contact Judy Postmus (postmus@ssw.umaryland.edu)** or **Johanna Thomas (johannat@uark.edu)**.