



Memorandum in Support: Social Work Workforce Act (A701/S988)

The National Association of Social Workers is the professional organization for social workers across the country. The New York State and New York City Chapters (NASW-NYS/NYC) are responsible for advocating for the nearly 62,000 licensed social workers in the state as well as their clients. NASW-NYS/NYC strongly support Assembly and Senate bill A701 (Gonzalez-Rojas)/S988 (Brouk). Passage of this bill would repeal the requirement that applicants must pass an examination in order to qualify as a licensed master social worker in New York State.

In 2022, after years of requests from schools and organizations, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) published a trend analysis of data on pass/fail rates by age and race from 2011-2021. Generally, the data showed significant disparities between white graduates and Black and Latinx graduates. In New York State, 86% of white graduates passed the LMSW on the first attempt, while only 49% of Black graduates and 62% of Latinx graduates did. Eventual pass rates also showed disparities; while almost 91% of white graduates eventually passed the exam, in contrast to the pass rate of 52% for Black graduates and 71% for Latinx graduates. Only 63% of graduates for whom English is not their first language pass the exam (the exam is only offered in English). Consequently, slightly more than half of Black graduates and only two-thirds of Latinx graduates become licensed MSW social workers in New York State. The test also poses significant barriers for the neurodivergent community.

The argument is not to remove licensure in the State. The integrity of the profession is the priority. “An exam, especially one with such obvious racial disparities manifested over a number of years, preventing people with language fluency and the lived experience of communities they serve, is an obstacle to service... we are not protecting the public if we don’t have enough social workers, particularly bi-lingual social workers and Black social workers to serve them. That is especially true at this moment when the mental health crisis among youth and the homelessness crisis are at their peaks.”¹

Not only is the exam a barrier to providing marginalized communities the care they need, but it also is a huge financial barrier for practicing social workers. There is no limit to how many times one may take this exam. “The State application costs \$294, and a limited permit is \$70. The ASWB LMSW exam has a fee of \$230, and the LCSW exam’s fee is \$260. You must pay the fee every time you take the exam.” Social workers have “spent at least 2,000 dollars and [are]

¹ Social Workers for Justice. <https://www.socialworkersforjustice.org/campaign>



completely exhausted and devastated. [They] have considered changing careers, but it's [their] passion to help people.”

Repealing the examination requirement to qualify as a licensed master social worker is not only an equitable decision, but it will also increasingly support the mental health crisis throughout the state. The National Association of Social Workers “opposes the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) social work licensing exams after a review of ASWB data shows significant disparities in pass rates for prospective social workers of color, older adults, neurodivergent individuals, and those who speak English as a second language.”² Therefore, the New York State Chapter of NASW is determined to advocate for the passage of A701, and the Senate same-as bill, S988, during the 2025 legislative session.

For all of the above reasons, the NASW-NYS/NYC Chapters enthusiastically supports A701/S988.

Signed, The National Association of Social Workers, New York State and New York City Chapters

Shakira A. Kennedy, PhD, LMSW
Executive Director of NASW NYS/NYC
NASW-NY Chapter P.O. Box 94 Cohoes NY 12047
Tel: 518-463-4741 ext. 101 Fax: 518-463-6446
skennedy.naswnys@socialworkers.org

Amanda Pressly, LLM
NASW NYS Policy Coordinator
NASW-NY Chapter P.O. Box 94 Cohoes NY 12047
518-350-6442 Ext. 384
apressly.naswnys@socialworkers.org

Ciera Dudley, MSW
NASW NYC Policy Coordinator
NASW-NY Chapter P.O. Box 94 Cohoes NY 12047

² “NASW opposes Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Exams”.
<https://www.socialworkers.org/News/News-Releases/ID/2611/NASW-Opposes-Association-of-Social-WorkBoards-ASWB-Exam>

188 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12210
518.463.4741 » naswnys.org

 **N A S W** · NEW YORK STATE CHAPTER
National Association of Social Workers



Tel: (212) 965-6112 ext: 865
cdudley.naswnys@socialworkers.org