MINNESOTA
BOARD OF SOCIAL WORK

An Equal Opportunity Employer

335 Randolph Ave Ste 245
Saint Paul MN 55102
612-617-2100 | fax 651-215-0956
social.work@state.mn.us | mn.gov/boards/social-work

Protecting the Public

JANUARY 19, 2024 – BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Members via WebEx:	Dieu Do, Public Member Linda Gustafson, Public Member Heidi Holmes, LICSW Lori Thompson, LSW Pa Der Vang, LICSW
Members In-person:	Christopher Anderson, Public Member Thomas Brooks, Public Member Jolene Engelking, LISW, Secretary/Treasurer Kate Goodman, LICSW, Vice Chair Stephanie Jacobson, LSW Tera Nelson, LSW – Arrived at 9:08 am Yolonda Rogers, LICSW – Arrived at 9:14 am
Members Absent:	Angie DeLille, LICSW
Staff In-person:	Youa Yang, LICSW, Executive Director Michelle Kramer-Prevost, LISW, Assistant Director Connie Oberle, Office Manager Kassandra Slizewski, LSW, Licensing Coordinator Tammy Molitor, Communications & Executive Services Coordinator
Staff Via Web-Ex:	Rebecca Moskow, JD, Compliance Unit Manager Jairus Ndulah, JD, Compliance Unit Investigator Colleen Vossen, Licensing Application Coordinator
Staff Absent:	NONE

MINUTES

1. **Call to Order & Approve Proposed Agenda**

   Goodman called meeting to order at 9:02am and read mission and value statements.
   Roll call attendance was taken. A quorum was present.

   ACTION: Engelking moved to approve the proposed agenda. Brooks seconded, roll call was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

2. **Consent Agenda:**
   A. Minutes November 17, 2023, Board Meeting Minutes
   B. Committee Reports
   C. Staff Leadership Reports

   ACTION: Anderson moved to approve the consent agenda. Holmes seconded, roll call was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Public Comment

Public comments are public data under Minn. Stat. Ch 13.
Written Public Comment: Submission of requests in advance are strongly encouraged, by 12:00pm (noon) on Thursday, November 16, 2023 by Noon, to the BOSW email address social.work@state.mn.us
Oral Public Comment: At discretion of Chair comments limited to 3 minutes per person
Public Comment took place at 9:15am, seventeen people offered comments. Public members were in attendance. Oral Public comment was offered, and nine Written Public comments were received.

Oral and Written Comment:

- Dear Members of the Board of Social Work,
  My name is Mina Himlie, and I earned a BSW from Augsburg University in 2023. I currently hold a LSW and am employed by Ampersand Families, where our mission is to provide permanency for older youth, typically aged 10 and up, in foster care. Thank you for the opportunity to give my input today. I would like to address the current requirement to take an exam as part of the licensure process.
  As a recent graduate, I remember intimately the stress and confusion that came with navigating the process to apply for, pay for, and take the licensure exam. During a time when we should have been thrilled and proud that the end was in sight, my cohort of fellow social workers and I, primarily students of color, stressed about whether we submitted all the paperwork in the right way, how we were going to pay for the exam, and how we were going to pass. We did practice questions every day during class, and half the time we still got them wrong despite being fully competent, empathetic, and studious people. The best exam advice we received was to throw our humanity out the window and rely solely on what the textbook said was the correct answer – a textbook written by white people and based on research by white people. In essence, we had to negate our lived experience and turn off our critical thinking in order to pass.
  This is not the social work I signed up for.
  The social work profession values the dignity and worth of a person, which means respecting each individual's lived experience and being "mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity." How does an exam with one right answer prepare us to do this? How does an exam prepare us at all? If an exam was really all it took to be a social worker, why do academic programs for social work have to be accredited? And if an academic program didn't teach the skills required to be a social worker, how did it get accredited?
  Our class time prepares us. Our internships prepare us. Our consultations with professors and supervisors and classmates prepare us. An exam shames us by holding us to a standard that white people decided was universally true and negating our different lived experiences. It creates barriers for people from marginalized communities with marginalized identities from being professionals.
  It's time for the social work profession to practice what it preaches. Remove the licensure exam requirement. Remove the barriers to a multicultural, diverse group of professionals. I believe it's possible. I believe we can do better for social workers – past, present, and future – and in doing that, we can do better for our clients as well.
  Thank you.Mina Himlie, LSW
  Family Support and Education Specialist
  Ampersand Families

- Dear Members of the Board of Social Work,
  I am Fathi Dakane, a Master of Social Work student at Augsburg University. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience today.
  I wish to share a deeper insight into my experience with the requirement of taking a racially- biased exam as part of the licensure process. When I graduated with my BSW degree, I went straight into an MSW program that started the following week. I soon realized that I was not able to work in the field with my BSW degree unless I passed the ASWB exam for my LSW license. I also realized that if I passed the exam for my LSW license, it would only be another year, as an advanced standing student, before I graduated with my MSW and would also need to pay for the LGSW license and exam. This exam creates not only a financial burden for students like me, but a barrier to professional social work practice. After successfully completing the BSW program, I am not able to work as a professional social worker right now to support myself financially and to pay for my MSW program, and I am not able to work as a social worker in my community that needs and deserves social workers who look like them.
  In navigating my social work education, I've faced not only late-night studying and seeking additional tutoring but also a persistent determination to overcome obstacles. Growing up in a community marked by resilience, I witnessed directly the transformative power of empathetic support. These experiences fueled my passion for social work and strengthened my commitment to uplifting marginalized voices.
  My journey is a testament to the unwavering spirit that propels me towards social work. I urge the Board of Social Work to reconsider the necessity of racially biased exams. Individuals like me, embodying the essence of social work without a formal license, deserve an accessible path to licensure that doesn't sustain barriers rooted in racial bias.
  Thank you for your time and consideration.

- Dear Members of the Board of Social Work,
  My name is Ana Pliego Gil and I am a BSW student at Augsburg University
  Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
  I would like to speak about the requirement to take an exam as part of the licensing requirements.
  I am a first-generation Latina student. I come from parents who immigrated to the United States for opportunities that only they could dream of. As you can imagine, people who come from a different country with low resources and low income most likely would take ages to be considered "stable." One of the many factors is that they do not have the legal status to be working therefore they find themselves settling for low paying jobs with no benefits. This pushes them to work the majority of the time. Which is what my family went through. They had to learn another language with no help and be able to fend for themselves. They had to work 12+ hours a day while juggling many other responsibilities such as making sure their children are receiving an education, providing food and shelter, sending money back home for their poor families, buying clothes for their growing children, etc.
  My parents are the first generation to settle in the US. They have worked overtime hours since they have arrived here. My parents would have my aunt take care of us when they would both work late at night. This made us miss many moments as a family, but they had to sacrifice the time and energy.
  Now that my siblings and I are grown up, we are working while juggling many other things such as school, internships, mental health, oppression, language barriers, etc.
  Do you see the pattern?
  Apart from paying college tuition, bills, transportation, food, which many students do not have the means to pay for, we are required to pay for an exam that is solely based on a one perspective rather than the injustices and real-life experiences that are happening currently. I understand that there should be some type of evidence that students understand but this exam is not it. It just supports the injustices that are present already.
  How can we oppress those who are working and looking out for the population?
  Please consider removing the licensing exam.
  The exam is a barrier to professional social work practice. Thank you.

- Dear Members of the Board of Social Work,
  My name is Sarah Gronert and I am a BSW student at Augsburg University. Thank you for allowing students to share our voices and opinions on these issues. I would, in particular, like to speak about the exam requirement for the licensure.
  First of all, I am someone who benefits from the current system. However, I believe the social work licensure process is behind the times, far more than a profession based in care and respect for others should be. We know standardized testing is problematic and that people all have different learning styles. This is something that have been proven and we are taught in our social work courses.
  So why do we turn around and do it anyways? We also know, for a fact, that this exam is racist and the financial burden of obtaining a license is an issue for many. I understand that this is not something that is comfortable to think about, but it is true. However, I don't understand why this is still happening.
  We can hope that the current licensure process can become better. However, this change cannot be a slow one. We cannot keep this racist barrier in place and just hope that training or language will be enough to change it. Every day this system is in place, you are discouraging people of color from becoming social workers. Every day, you are reinforcing these barriers.
  I apologize for my tone during this email, I know you are the board and we are meant to be respectful and polite. I am just not sure that I could portray how strongly I (and many other Augsburg students) feel about this issue. I figure, as a BSW class who will be taking this exam very soon, our voices matter and we should not have to dull our point to be heard.
  Again, my request is that you remove the exam as a social work licensure requirement. Thank you.

- Dear Social Work Board Members,
  My name is X Tran and I am an Augsburg BSW student and will go pursue my MSW upon graduating with my bachelor's.
  I would like to speak about the requirement to take an exam as part of the licensing requirements, and urge the council to support a bill that would relieve some of the stress of post-grad social work students.
  When I claim my bachelor's degree I will be the first in my family to have gone onto higher education and will be the first to attain my master's. After reading about the out of pocket costs for taking the exam and then paying for the license, it made my blood boil. I already have a heap of student loan debt, and now there's even more costs upon graduation. I will be spending even more money that I don't have and more time in higher ed, just to be blocked from working in the field because of an exam and additional out of pocket costs. I understand paying the license sure, but it would be great to consider not making the test a requirement to lift some weight off the shoulders of future social work graduates.
  The barrier of entry to becoming a social worker has seriously made me consider whether or not I've wasted my 4 years and wonder if I will be another person with a bachelor's/master's and end up not using it because of road blocks that got in the way. At the end of the day, what I want to do is work with queer black and brown youth and young adults, and show them that they can be what they set out to be. To inspire them and help them reach their goals. To not let hardships and their background determine who they are, and let them determine who they are.
  With that being said, the exam is a barrier to professional social work practice, and it should be removed as a requirement.
  Thank you for your time. X Tran, they/them

- Good morning,
  I hope you are all well and that the new year has been kind to you. Sending you all my warmest wishes on these beloved cold MN days, and thank you all for all you do for our state and communities!
  I am writing today because it has come to my attention that the Board has taken the position to continue to oppose the elimination of licensing exams. Social work is a profession that prides itself on making data informed decisions, so your position on this alarms me considering the data and research clearly tell us exams are not an adequate way to measure competency and that exams are an active barrier to a diverse and growing workforce. Stakeholders have made their voices clear at your meetings, in the legislature, and in other public spaces. There is an emerging mass movement that supports removing the exam requirement.
  As I discussed with Youa last session and despite what I understand to be your current position on this, I am re-confirming (for those who may not have gotten the memo and in the spirit of transparency) that I will be pursuing legislation and guiding organizing efforts to follow the research and move forward with the proposed elimination of the license exam. I am open to engaging with you all about this, and I hope that the testimony and advocacy at your next meeting will shed more light on this issue and will encourage you to reconsider your collective position on this. I would love to have your support and collaboration as we work toward eliminating this well-known barrier to diversifying and growing the workforce.
  We know that the biases embedded in the current exam model significantly contribute to the exclusion of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latine, and LGBTQIA2s+ people as well as immigrants and people from poverty from the profession the most. I think it is safe to say that we also collectively acknowledge the lack of diversity in social work, so I would like to better understand how and why the board has arrived at the conclusion to keep the test in place considering this data. My colleagues look to me to answer questions like this, and, at this time, I have been unable to substantiate a logical reason why the board has taken this position when the data says otherwise. Your input on this would be extremely helpful and insightful.
  From where my colleagues, the advocates who have approached me, and I are standing, the research has taught us to know better than to keep barriers like this in place, so it seems that it is time to do better and actively address this head on. Luckily, we are operating in a profession that is categorically committed to humility, intentional inclusion, advocacy, self-determination, and anti-racism. As such, I am very confident that we have what it takes to stand together to remove this barrier and reach a pragmatic solution on this and more.
  From a wider macro lens, I need not preach to you that this conversation is happening loud and clear in the legislature. A weak workforce means there are Minnesotans who are unable to receive the services they need, the therapy they need, and the support they need during critical points in their lives. It means your board has to raise license fees on the smaller workforce which adds stress to our current workforce system (albeit a necessary increase). It means people and clients don't feel like they can count on social workers because the case loads are always too high, the burnout is too high, and the cost to stay licensed continues to rise and turnover grows. Meanwhile, insurance companies aren't increasing reimbursements, there are menial increases in other service arenas, the cost of living is out of control, student loan debt is unreasonably unaffordable, and the call for more social workers in police departments, hospitals, and schools continues to grow.
  At this point, we will be short 16,000 social workers by 2030 according to DEED*, and we have no collaborative nor functional plan to address it. This is an absolute crisis, and arguably the biggest crisis facing the credibility and sustainability of our profession – and I would even argue that this is one of the biggest crises facing our entire state to a certain degree. The legislature has made significant investments in mental health, human services, child protection, and ancillary supports, but those investments fall short if there are not enough workers to deliver the services. (*Note: this number was calculated before the bills from our latest legislative session were taken into consideration, so I anticipate this number will be even higher considering all the new programing we authorized. I will be getting an updated report in February.)
  It is my opinion that it is up to social workers, the board, the association, students, and those of us with election certificates and backgrounds in social work to stand together to come to consensus on how to best remove systemic barriers and how to effectively be the change we need in Minnesota. We have the power to tell our own story, fix our own internal issues and barriers, and provide Minnesotans with the strong, reliable, and professional social work advocacy and workforce that they deserve if we work together to find solutions.
  I look forward to our joint, continued efforts to support social workers in MN and to doing our part to make sure there are enough social workers here to provide the services to Minnesotans who need them. I will see you at your next meeting and look forward to discussing exam elimination and/or my other social work-related bills soon. (Reminder ICYMI: I will also be advocating for more higher education pathways to social work, more paid internships, title protection, an interstate compact, and more tools to address this education and workforce crisis).
  Thank you again for your time and public service,
  Rep Jess Hanson

- My name is Jessica Navarro, and I'd like to start by sharing that I'll be taking the exam on Monday. But, I'd like to cover all the barriers to securing that date.
  As a rural, also known as greater Minnesota resident, there were no testing sites near my home because I have a physical disability and do not drive out of town. I had to hire a driver. The financial burden of taking this exam as a low-income mother is a hardship, especially on top of all the other fees involved with licensing. I sought accommodations to take the exam, and even engage to others to help me in this process. Ultimately, I secured accommodations for ELL status because of the documentation for physical disability was excessive and unattainable.
  The time and difficulty I had securing accommodations seems unreasonable and added to my wait time impacting my joy options and income. I am taking these steps because I value being a part of the social work profession and have the strength to contribute. I do not believe the exam will tell you or others my work as a future social worker. Instead, I trust that my social work professors had many measures in place while I got my degree, and I trust the supervision I received during my practicum and now my employment.
  As someone with test anxiety, this isn't an effective tool for me. I support creating an alternative pathway that emphasizes the other measures of competency and accountability. Thank you.

- My name is Jonathan. Thank you for having this and having me her today.
  I am a military combat veteran. I graduated from the University of St. Thomas with a MSW back in 2017. I work for the VA because they allow you to work with no license in order to get your license with three years. I have taken the test (exam) at least ten times and failed all ten times.
  I am unemployed now because I cannot pass this test. I don't even like to use the word 'cannot' because I don't believe in it. I don't know what it is. I've heard test anxiety and biases, and I don't particularly adhere to that, but what I do know is it something that is hindering people like myself from making a decent income. I went to school for social work because I love people and I wanted to help and want to make a change in the world and I can't do that without a license. That is the only thing that is hindering me. All of my supervisors say 'you are one of the top social workers we have met.' But the embarrassment of going there and keep taking this test over and over. I've studied. I've gone online and used them costing me $270 some down. The money that I put into this is over $2,000 just to get positive and I cannot get by. I am having a difficult time getting by. I don't know what can be done, that's why I'm gonna put it in your hands. But I think something really needs to be done. Thank you.

- Good morning to you, my name is Shavaun Kerf. I come to you with the heart of disappointment, and a desire to change a perspective in which you see social workers and the work that they do on a daily basis. I'm here to help redefine the identity of a social worker. Twenty years ago, I made a bold statement self and before God to help people. I wasn't sure that would come about, so
  So in 2001, I took the hand of my son, a smile on my face, and joy in my heart to make changes. And then in 2005, I graduated with a bachelor's degree of science in social work with a minor in criminal justice. I also represented NASW for my college, traveled and help to create new commercials to help represent social workers properly.
  And so, As I stand before you, it's been an honor to serve young people, children, young adults, adults in the field of mental heal career and college coordination, schools, jails, JDCs communities and community organizations, and giving back to the community. You see, when I began this journey, I believed, I knew who I was at the moment. I knew without a doubt that I would move and change the world with the gifts given to me. I had a plan. Then after college, I moved focus on helping young girls to find out exactly who they were and overcome obstacles in their way. So, in 2007, I moved to Minneapolis, I had no plans of taking the licensure exam, to be honest, but like Jonathan, I took it four times and missed by one point every single time, and I finally did pass it in 2012.
  But the most disappointing part was after 20 years, and so many years of being in social work, as Social Workers we are unspokenly required to bear the weight of everyone in our caseload, including family members, service providers, judges, lawyers, prosecuting attorneys, PAs, guardians ad litem , those who are in client's lives. We had to block and barricade hurt, harm, and danger from the as social workers. The world attempts to place the super cape on us. This is just a false narrative that is unfair and unnecessary.
  During the time I was a social worker, because I had decided to put my licensure down, I decided to NOT renew it ever. Because my most recent experience reminded me that I don't have to wear a super cape. Where is the true restoration of who restores, who helps restore social workers that help restore people? There is an expectation of social workers, again to be superhuman. They're supposed to have love and compassion, show up all the time, never make a mistake, and yet when you make a mistake you are crucified. And just basically put to death because of a mistake, and did you ever think that maybe the minds, hearts, and spirits of social workers can only take so much. The capacity in which we have, can only hold a certain amount of 'one at times. With high caseload, no support, and unnecessary amount of expectation, we find ourselves exhausted to the point of tears. What I have done is, I've taken everything I've learned from social work and I've applied it in a different perspective.
  So I come to the board with a bold statement and a bold request and can I propose to you to change a narrative of how social workers are seen. And may I propose to you the more effective and realistic tools are put into place spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically to see that every social worker is seen and treated as a beautiful man or woman that they are. And so, I come to you today and bring and come to the table and break bread with you to redefine this and I'm willing to be able to just

do that. And so, I come to you to offer a solution to help redefine the identity of a social worker. I don't know what that's going to look like, but I'm willing to work with the board at a high level to reach, my brother here, who has strived and loves people. That's what social workers are. The essence of a social worker is human behavior in the social environment and bringing people together. Thank you for your time.

- Hi I'm Brittany Clausen. I started in the social work field in 2016 interested in helping marginalized youth find housing. What I didn't know then that I learned through my education was that we're bound by six core values. I want to highlight the value, dignity, and worth of a person. This by far is the hardest value to practice in my opinion because it forces all of us to see one another where we are in life and still value their excellence at parameters that they set. I struggled to do this in the field because the system defined to our young folks was that success look like and I grappled with helping them meet those milestones because I didn't even know what they were for myself.
  I say that to say that oftentimes, we put measurements for success on people to help us feel good about the work we're doing because we want to make a difference. This also helps us check the box. In reality, that is not equity and that is not inclusion. I turned on my laptop screen today to share with you all that. I want to be licensed. I want to give back in an ethical way bound by my protection and that of my clients. So that folks feel safe to share their true and most vulnerable stories so they can heal. We have all seen an experience what it looks like when we're in pain, we make unfair and cruel choices that hurt the people and the very thing that we wish to make better. Dignity and worth of a person means that you see the whole situation a person is facing, what systems are at play to hinder them from getting the help that they need.
  Have you ever had a health problem where it was hard to find a specialist to serve you? You had to sit on a weeks, possibly months long waitlist not knowing if they were the right person. You were worried, you were discouraged, you second guessed if they could help you. It took so much energy to wait and be patient just to find out that they weren't the right fit. Our BIPOC folks need variety of mental health practitioners to explore healing and we can't meet that request if we do not have a variety of licensed BIPOC professionals.
  In school, they taught me what adequate supervision and proper preparation in the field looks like. I took the LGSW exam twice and failed because the way the test was written confused my understanding of all that I learned. I developed imposter syndrome and questioned if I could ever pass the test. How could I feel that way after receiving a 3.9GPA?
  The core message today is to find and know the dignity and worth of a person and you may possibly think, how can I do that when we serve all of Minnesotans and must do our due diligence to protect them. Easy. Look at the data. It's unethical to measure success by one exam, considering all the characteristics that make up marginalized people. Systemic racism is deeply embedded in everything we do. To unpeel one layer means you're looking at another. Do yourself a favor and unpeel the first layer. That is the commitment you signed up for. Do what is necessary to right the wrong, so that more BIPOC Minnesotans can thrive through healthy healing practices from trustworthy, and licensed BIPOC mental health professional. This is how you dismantle systemic racism. Take one problem after another until people feel valued and heard. This is true justice, equity, and inclusion. Join me and so many others and be a part of the solution and not the problem. Find alternative pathways to licensure. Thank you.

- Thank you, respected members of the Minnesota Board of Social work, for your time this morning. My name is Tonio Gonzales Ogas. I completed my Bachelor of Science and sociology and my Master of Arts and education and leadership from Western New Mexico University from 1997-1999. I began working on my MSW at New Mexico Highland University in 2015, and transferred and fished that process from the University of Minnesota in 2018. I have been an MSW since then. I have been in social work roles since 1997. I am now going on my 27th year of working in social services and now three years an LGSW working towards becoming an LICSW. It took me four attempts to pass my LGSW exam, the third time I missed it by one point and the fourth time, I barely met the minimum to finally pass the LGSW exam. As of this moment, I have completed all the requirement now to become an LICSW, with the exception of passing the LICSW exam, which I have now failed twice. I am now working up the courage to take it a third time.
  I am an experienced clinician who is bilingual. I am a Minnesota transplant with vast years of knowledge, and experiences of working in many social work roles. I'm constantly working to improve my qualifications through training, most recently becoming trained in brain spotting phase 1 and 2. I have a brain spotting training with children and adolescents that is coming up next month and phase 3 will happen in March. These are expensive trainings. My employer and my co-workers are continually affirming my abilities and I have recently been promoted, still as an LGSW, as a clinical director of SciFi TMS. My clients are amazing. I absolutely love them all. I've worked with many of them ever since becoming and LGSW. They would also attest to my abilities as a therapist. I know I am a competent social worker and a therapist, and I want to be accountable to my clients and to the public and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to be successful and to be a qualified therapist in the State of Minnesota.
  Now that the seventh time of taking a standardized social work exam is approaching, I am, again, feeling the stress of figuring out how to prepare for this exam. I'm having a considerable amount of things that I'm having to put off, trainings that I would like to attend, things in my life that I need to re-prioritize, yet again, as I am preparing to do this one more time. Taking these exams are expensive, both ASWB, and the test prep entities are making profound amounts of money from people like me. Also, the exhaustion and trauma that my body feels every single time I complete this test is starting to wear me down and I've contemplated changing careers several times. I have a very good photographic memory, and oftentimes, when I'm reading a question from the exam, I will recall a page where I read the content related to that particular question. But oftentimes, there

are two very strong choices. There feels like there is a very strong disconnect from the content I am studying to the question that exist on this test. I have studied much for every single exam that I took.
I feel like my 27 years of experience are working against me in this exam. I feel like my intuition works against me with this exam. I feel like my common sense works against me in this exam. I feel like my problem-solving skills work against me in this exam because in this format I am being told that there is a textbook answer to the solution of working with a very dynamic client situation and we all know that is not true.
I don't experience test anxiety. I can resume a new test and forget that I failed it five times. I can focus on those four hours on nothing else than the task in front of me, but I cannot unlearn 27 years of social work experience to pass this one, standardized, one-size fits all, test. I am not programmable, nor do I ever want to be.
This test is very harmful to some of us and I would like to request an alternative to this format. I'll do whatever it takes to become an LICSW, and if that includes taking it 20 times, though I very much hope that is not the case, I will do it. But please know that I am trying very, very hard not to give up. I'm an impeccable therapist, and a social worker who, at this very moment, is struggling to wrap my brain around the format of these questions.
I want to thank you all very much for your time this morning, and I am available for individual follow-up if you so desire. Thank you.

- Dear Members of the Board of Social Work,
  My name is Kao Nou Moua, and I am a social work professor at Augsburg University. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
  I urge the Board of Social Work to support a bill that would remove the requirement to take a racially-biased exam.
  As a social work professor, my students and I regularly discuss what it means to engage in ethical practice. We do this by reviewing case studies, referring to our professional code of ethics, and examining our personal experiences. We do this by using critical thinking and asking questions of one another. Today, I am asking the Board of Social Work to consider if it is ethical to require people to take a racially-biased exam.
  In August of 2022, ASWB's president wrote the following after they released their own passage rates by demographics: "[licensing exam pass rate data] illuminates the historical burdens of racial trauma, marginalization, and social injustice to which Black candidates have been disproportionately subjected along their journey to licensure." Is it ethical to require people to pay to take an exam that its own organization (ASW)B described as "racial trauma, marginalization, and social injustice?"
  Is it ethical to require people to take a racist exam because this exam is the only one that exists right now and it's the best we've got?
  In the classroom, we often discuss hypothetical situations and what-if scenarios. But the questions I've asked today are real situations. This is happening right now and will continue to happen if we do not address removing standardized testing.
  Again, I urge the Board of Social Work to support a bill this legislative session that removes the requirement to take an exam.
  Thank you for your time,
  Kao Nou L. Moua, MSW, PhD, LGSW Assistant Professor
  Augsburg University

- My name is Aihomon Ebojie. I'm a first-generation student and I'm a macro and forensic social worker focusing on policy change and finding various discrimination complaints around the community. I'm also the secretary for the Minneapolis NAACP and an unlicensed social worker.
  I've been studying mental health since 2013, and time and time again, with schooling, we have to pay for tests that results do not signify my work, drive, and motivation and the work that I do. I have taken the test now two times and six points within passing both times. I love what I do but I'm tired. I'm tired of spending over $200 to retake this test over and over. This is extra money that I do not have. Unlicensed social workers have high caseloads and are underpaid. I'm deciding if I want to reschedule this test again. But I want to pass this test because I want to go on to law school. Like Britney said, we need to find other alternatives to license social workers. Thank you for your time.

- Minnesota Board of Social Work, 335 Randolph Ave Ste 245, Saint Paul, MN 55102
  January 18, 2024, Public Comment Submission for the January 19, 2024 Board Meeting
  Board of Social Work Members:
  It is with highest regard for the mission of the Board of Social Work that I wish to express growing concern regarding the state's prerequisite for licensure by examination. Until more equitable pathways for licensure can be established, I request that at minimum an immediate suspension of this practice be considered and share support around a movement to eliminate the use of examination altogether without sufficient alternatives in place that have been designed to promote a more equitable pathway to all levels of licensure.
  There is evidence that large disparities in pass rates among age and racial groups are being perpetuated by our continued use of the exam. I have been a witness to this disparity over the course of my career as a social worker in both Illinois and Minnesota. I believe biased testing is compounding an already unprecedented period of staffing shortages, which has proved to be especially taxing on the industries where social work is most prevalent and within service sectors where culturally and linguistically appropriate providers are critically needed but exceedingly rare. These issues are undeniably linked to our nation mental health crisis and intensifying opioid epidemic. The need for innovative solutions to address disparities across our

systems of care cannot be further delayed and must include innovation around a workforce that is being asked to heal on the front lines of a complexity of social issues. A test cannot possibly determine whether a professional is skilled and effective.
I am in strong support of the board's intention to provide oversight to make certain we meet the needs of all citizens and promote a diverse, inclusive, and qualified workforce. I support pathways to licensure that ensure high skill and capacity, but I believe more emphasis and greater resource allocation must be considered in the areas of training and supervision, not point in time testing of an individual's ability to retain information.
It has been a privilege working alongside practitioners in their pursuit of licensure. I have worked with individuals over the course of years, only to encounter a barrier to promotion at the final stage in failure to pass a test, despite partnership around test preparations. As a supervisor, who believes a practitioner is ready to practice independently, there must be alternatives in place to allow for promotion and continued practice. It is in these experiences that I have come to question the purpose of the test and the resulting impact of testing on our profession. In a field where we need high skill with uncompromising compassion, not memorization of theory, the test is creating insurmountable barriers for practitioner, especially for people of color and people with lived experience. As it is currently designed, I believe testing as a prerequisite to licensure is actively stunting access and earning potential, especially among these groups. If we agree to continue the licensure exam at any level, reasonable and accessible alternative pathways to licensure must exist alongside.
Thank you for your consideration of this issue. If there is anything I can do to better support the advancement of these concerns, please contact me at any time.
Sincerely, Kathleen Fischer, LICSW #28586
(847)602-2200 akbfisch@gmail.com

- Good morning, everyone, I'm Ms. Vickers and I appreciate the consideration for creating a more equitable licensing system with alternative pathways for social work licensure. However, I'm here today to express my strong opposition to the proposed requirement for gaining a provisionary license, which would entail trained social workers like myself, taking and intentionally failing the licensing exam followed by obtaining the provisionary license only with additional hours of supervision.
  I earned my BSW degree at Metro State University in December of 2022. Metro State's accredited social work program mandates that all students, including myself, achieve competency in social work practice standards outlined by the Council of Social Work Education, a recognized accreditation for social work education. Additionally, I successfully completed the field requirements through internship under supervision of licensed social workers. My professors in my accredited program and my supervisors affirm my capability to be an effective social worker, making me fully qualified to practice social work with the exception of not completing the licensure exam.
  The evidence of the racial bias in the licensure exam is clear, especially considering the 33% success rate for first time test takers who are black. The proposed action would be unjust to black social workers like me. Paying a fee to sit for an exam designed without consideration for my competency and risk failure is unjust. The BSW exam statistics reveal a stark contrast with three quarters of white social workers passing their exam on the first attempt, while black social work graduates fail at the rate close to their white peer success rate with 63% to 67%. Implementing the suggested proposal would be unethical and harmful, placing additional financial barriers of burdens on me for additional supervision that my white counterparts would not have to bear. I thank you so much for allowing me to speak.

- My name is Sarah Busch. I'm here this morning on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Minnesota Chapter of which I am a board member and a co-chair of the policy committee. I am also a licensed graduate social worker and have been practicing under that license since 2016. I'm here today to share my concerns with the Board of Social Work's position on requiring candidates seeking provisional licensure to fail the licensing exam first.
  We've heard some really moving stories about the difficulties in taking the exam and I want to add some data to those really moving personal stories.
  The exam pass rate published by the Association of Social Work Boards in 2022 clearly show and unacceptable racial bias in this exam. At the bachelor's level, 76% of white candidates pass the exam compared to 64% of Native American candidates, 60% of Asian candidates, 53% of Hispanic and Latino candidates, and 33% of black candidates. I do not believe that social workers can defend this existing exam while upholding our code of ethics. Our profession is grounded in social justice, we cannot ignore this data, nor can we continue subjecting licensing candidates to the harm of taking an obviously bias exam.
  At NASW, we have proposed several licensing reforms this session, including opening up the provisional license licensing pathway to more people, and eliminating the licensing exam requirement for all non-clinical social workers. We have shared this position publicly with the Board during public comments and found several areas of agreement. However, we disagree on whether or not to require a licensing candidate to take and presumably fail the exam before pursuing provisional licensing. We believe that the multiple and adequate measures of competency already exist without an exam. We are open to strengthening requirements in other areas, such as supervision. However, we do not believe it is ethical to continue subjecting social workers to a harmful practice while we or the Association of Social Work Boards consider alternatives.
  While we believe that the licensing exam does not accurately measure a professional competency overall and our values will prevent us from supporting your position, we are willing to compromise with the Board by dropping the full elimination of the exam for non-clinical licensees in favor of not requiring provisional licensees to fail the exam. Based on conversations with lawmakers, we believe that pursuing competing legislation will stall both of our proposals and prevent the progress we both seek. It is in all of our best interest to reach a compromise quickly. Thank you very much for your time.

- 1/17/2024

  Dear Members of the Board of Social Work,
  My name is Amy Sinayoko, and I am a current MSW student at St Mary's University.
  Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience. I would like to speak about the requirement to take an exam as part of the licensure process.
  I graduated from St Catherine University with my BSW in May 2022. I have taken the ASWB test twice, and failed. For this reason, I can't find a job in the field. I really want to work in the hospital or nursing home as a social worker, but they all require a license. There are great social workers who don't have a license because they have not passed the exam, and an exam should not limit them or define if they are good social workers or not. I have talked to previous social workers, and they are having difficulties passing the test because of test anxiety, or can't afford to take it anymore.
  I am requesting the Board of Social Work to please eliminate both BSW and MSW exams. This will give a lot of social workers out there the opportunity to get a job and support their families.
  Thank you.
  Amy Sinayoko

4. **Member Roundtable**:

   The new vice chair, Jacobson, led a roundtable discussion. January typically honors Board members whose terms have come to an end. This year Goodman, Thompson, and Vang end their current term, but they can serve up to the end of June 2024 or until their position has been filled by the Governor's office. Board member Weaver has had to step down from her position early.
   Board members went around the room to give appreciation to those members whose term came to a close, and to Weaver for her time of service to the Board.

5. **Staff Leadership Reports:**

   A. Executive Director Report: Yang
   - Shared about the Board member vacancies, legislative updates, staff transition with the Board, and variance request. See Executive Director report for more information.

   B. Licensing Unit: Kramer-Prevost
   - Annual Statistics comparing the number of applications and licenses issued in the year 2023 to the past couple of years. The trends are similar and going up each year on the different applications and license types with provisional remaining the same due to no changes in statute.

   C. Compliance Unit: Moskow
   - Jessi Aguilar will be missed terribly, and we are very grateful to have had her be a part of the compliance team. She put in an extreme amount of hard work during her time at the Board of Social Work and especially leading up to her resignation to make the transition for the next person go smoothly.
   - Compliance statistics were presented to the board and things are trending in the right direction. There were 489 complaints last year, and only 187 are currently open, and addressing them as efficiently as possible.

6. **Oral Reports**

   A. Legislation & Rules Committee - Jacobson
   There has been a continued look at licensing exemptions with a Q & A document addressing questions the board may receive concerning the removal of the county exemption.
   Other topics will be addressed during the Legislative Update/Discussion later in the meeting.

   B. Finance Committee - Engelking
   Engelking will remain the Finance Committee Chair as she is the Treasurer for the board. Things are on track financially for this time of the budget year and going as projected. Revenue is slightly ahead by about 2%. Odyssey Funds were approved to pay for the cost of the Jurisprudence Exam and the IT related items. Going forward with the current legislative items at hand there will be some impact for the next fiscal year/budget.

   C. Community Education Outreach Committee (CEOC): Do
   In outgoing chairperson, DeLille's absence, Do, incoming chairperson gave the report. The committee approved the October meeting minutes, reviewed some of the desegregated data reports from the license survey analysis, elected a new chair for the committee, and had updates from staff for education outreach. Slizewski, licensing coordinator, is providing student presentations for BSW and MSW programs.

D. Leadership & Development Committee: Goodman/Jacobson
Goodman, outgoing chair of the committee, gave the report due to the meeting schedule of L & D Committee. The new chairperson, Jacobson, will be reporting going forward. The committee is reevaluating options for trainings in the new year. They are looking for options for training from the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a possible retreat for board members in the future.

BOARD INFORMATION

- **Review of Strategic Plan 2021-2024 -** Yang
  The strategic plan was created in 2021 and has been modified and carried over to include year 2024. The goal for L & D is to work on organizing a new strategic plan to start in 2025. L & D will have a planning session to discuss strategic planning session. Some priorities to include are items such as the Social Work Licensing Compact and provisional license. Yang highlighted some of the major areas that have been completed and those which will be moving forward.
- Concerns were expressed regarding time spent on the jurisprudence exam. It was explained that the exam is in statute, so the Board is required to implement it. The delay is attributed to working with MNIT to execute a contract before the project could start. Board staff prepared for implementation of the exam including question preparation. The start of the project is beyond the Board's control due to delays by other State entities.
- Question: Since JP exam was passed in 2017, do we have to update the questions since we are now in 2024 and it was supposed to be implemented by 2022? Yes, staff are reviewing the questions to ensure it's still relevant to current statute.
  The JP Exam is based on the practice act (Statute/Law). It is voluntary to complete the JP Exam with the license renewal. The licensee will receive 1 free CE after passing the JP exam. It is required in statute for licensee who are on temporary leave and want to reactivate their license. The 1-hour CE could be used as continuing education hours at renewal.
- **Customer Satisfaction Survey 2023 –** Yang
  - The Customer Satisfaction Survey is a part of the strategic plan to collect information from licensees/public and has been implemented since 2019. It will be published on the website after the board meeting. The survey was open for a month. There were 496 respondents compared to the previous year of 218 respondents. Yang highlighted a few questions from the survey regarding calls, the ease of navigating the website, and issues with supervision in online services.
  - A new question was added to the survey this year to reflect the transition of sending renewal notices via email rather than by mail. As this is a new process, there were not many responses to this question and there were mixed reviews about it; some like it, some don't.
  - It's noticeable difference between Online Services and the Website when it comes to many of the comments. Most of the concerns and questions are about the Online Services portal from licensees/Applicants. The Board is working on some plain language to make the website more user friendly. We can address some of the concerns, but we will need to be mindful of the cost of these possible upgrades, so it is more manageable for our budget.

8. **Legislative Process Presentation**

- Lindsey Franklin, the new Legislative Liaison for the Minnesota Health Licensing boards started on December 18, 2023. She is an attorney, new to Minnesota with a heart for state and local policy and has lots of experience in this area. Franklin gave a presentation of the Legislative Process in Minnesota with some background information of how the process works. Franklin is not a lobbyist for the Board, and she will not craft any bills that will go forward. She knows the legislative process and will consult the board in that area for best practices.

9. **Legislative Update/Discussion –** Anderson

- Yang, Anderson, Vang, Kramer-Prevost, and Moskow, met with the Coalition of Social Workers to listen about proposed compromises to the Board's provisional license bill. Board learned that the Coalition also drafted a similar bill. The Coalition's bill language shared with the Board contains information about title protection and remove licensure by exam for all license levels.
- The Social Work Coalition would like the Board of Social Work to reconsider the requirement to take the exam one time and not pass before applying for a provisional license. Concerns raised about success of the Board's bill if there are two legislative bills about one statute. Provisional license is a policy bill with fiscal impact but could be delayed up to two years before the bill could be reintroduce if not successful this session.

- A discussion period was held about whether to remove the requirement to take the exam at least once for provisional license. There were some concerns about the title protection portion of the Coalition's bill. The point was brought up about hierarchy of licensure and what this means for participation with the Social Work Compact and legislative bill when provisional licensees have not passed the qualifying national exam.
- It was suggested that the Legislation and Rules Committee review this area of legislation in the future and possibly create a 'true' alternative to pathway for licensure that includes a multi-application licensure process.
- In additional, staff reminded board members that this change will have fiscal impact. It will lead to increase licensing fees and possible addition of staff position.

MOTION: Brooks made a motion to keep the language drafted in the Board of Social Work Provisional License Legislation moving provisional license from Statute 148D to Statute 148E with the additional change of striking 148D.01(3) "has taken the applicable examination administered by the Association of Social Work Boards or similar examination body designed by the board at least once and failed the examination", Goodman seconded. Roll call was taken.
VOTES: Gustafson and Holmes - Opposed. Anderson, Brooks, Do, Engelking, Goodman, Jacobson, Nelson, Rogers, Thompson, and Vang - in support. The motion passed.

A discussion of the proposed bill HF 2886 Modifying Social Worker Title Protection Provisions that the Social Work Coalition introduced in the previous legislative session. In September the Board decided to oppose the bill due to concerns that the title protection bill does not address county exemptions. With additional discussion about title protection, the Board reviewed their position of opposition and voted to change to neutral.

MOTION: Brooks made the motion to reverse the Board's decision to oppose Title Protection in HF 2886 and remain neutral on the Title Protection portion of the bill from the Social Work Coalition. Anderson seconded. Roll call was taken.
VOTES: Engelking, and Holmes – Opposed. Anderson, Brooks, Do, Goodman, Gustafson, Jacobson, Nelson, Rogers, Thompson, and Vang were in support. The motion passed.

10. **12:33pm -12:50pm Lunch Break**

12. **Executive Session (Closed to Public):**
ACTION: Engelking moved to close the meeting for executive session. The motion was seconded by Anderson. Roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

ACTION: Compliance Panel B moved to adopt the Stipulation and Consent Order for Conditions for Amanda Yliniemi, LGSW, License #27337. Votes to approve: Anderson, Brooks, Do, Engelking, Goodman, Gustafson, Holmes, Jacobson, Nelson, Rogers, Thompson, and Vang.

ACTION: Compliance Panel A moved to continue the Order for Temporary Suspension for Reuben Aponte, LGSW, License #24404. Votes to approve: Brooks, Do, Engelking, Goodman, Gustafson, Jacobson, Rogers, and Thompson.

ACTION: The process for the Executive Director Review of Youa Yang was explained, Board members and Staff were sent a survey to complete anonymously. Answers were tallied and sent to Vang to compile a report. A motion to approve the yearly review of the Executive Director, Youa Yang, was made and seconded. Roll call was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

ACTION: Brooks made a motion to grant Executive Director, Youa Yang, an achievement award for her performance and Anderson seconded. Roll call was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

ACTION: A motion was made by Engelking to reopen the meeting and was seconded by Jacobson. Roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

13. **Adjourn**
ACTON: A motion was made by Engelking and seconded by Gustafson to adjourn the meeting. Roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jolene Engelking

Jolene Engelking, LISW
Secretary/Treasurer