

# LD 1298 - An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing

Introduced by Senator Rachel Talbot Ross with bipartisan support, LD 1298 establishes a method for a person who has attempted and failed to complete a State Board of Social Worker Licensure examination (the ASWB exam) for licensure as a licensed social worker; licensed master social worker; licensed master social worker, conditional clinical; or licensed clinical social worker to qualify for licensure through an alternative pathway.

## Why the ASWB Exam just isn't enough?

### Maine's ASWB Pass Rate Data: 2011 - 2021 Masters Level Exam



White test takers first time pass rate



Black test takers first time pass rate



White test takers eventual pass rate



Black test takers eventual pass rate

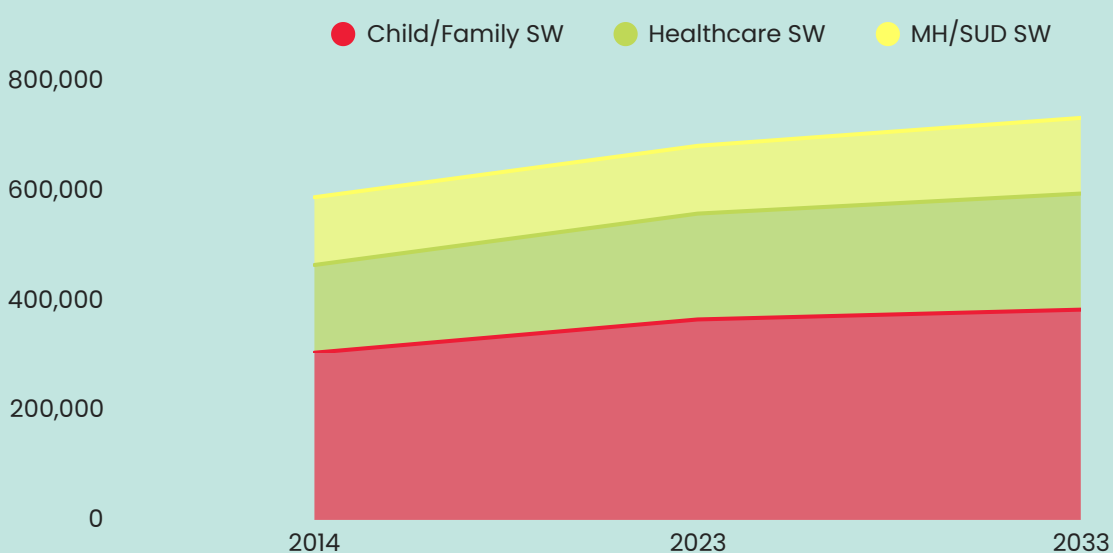


English speaking test takers first time pass rate



Non-English speaking test takers first time pass rate

### America's Growing Behavioral Health Workforce Development Needs



Sources:

- Occupational Outlook Handbook. (2024, August 29). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved April 10, 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm>
- Profile of the Social Work Workforce. (2017, October). National Association of Social Workers. Retrieved April 10, 2025, from <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=wCttjrHq0gE%3D&portalid=0>

This bill is a continuation and evolution of previous efforts to reform social work licensure in Maine. LD 1298 incorporates feedback from multiple stakeholders to offer test takers a way into the social work profession at a time when Maine needs trained and competent social workers the most.



# LD 1298 - An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing

## Talking Points:

### 1. Purpose of Licensure and Public Protection:

- Licensure is essential to protect the public and uphold professional standards in social work.
- However, the tools we use to assess readiness for licensure must be valid, equitable, and aligned with the realities of practice.

### 2. Disparities in ASWB Exam Outcomes:

- ASWB data show significant disparities in pass rates based on race, age, and language proficiency.
- These outcomes raise concerns about systemic bias and the exam's ability to accurately assess competency.

### 3. Limitations of a Single, Standardized Exam:

- The ASWB exam measures test-taking ability more than practical, real-world skills. It creates a high-stakes barrier that disproportionately excludes well-qualified and trained professionals from entering the workforce.
- This undermines efforts to build a workforce that reflects the communities across Maine we serve.

### 4. Equity and Workforce Implications:

- The current model of licensing exam requirements restricts access to licensure for historically marginalized groups.
- Fewer licensed social workers from diverse backgrounds means less culturally responsive care and a missed opportunity to advance health equity.

### 5. Alternative Licensure Pathways:

- Competency-based assessments, supervised practice models, and jurisprudence exams offer more holistic assessments of practice.
- These alternatives maintain rigorous standards while addressing equity concerns and honoring the lived experiences of candidates.

### 6. Alignment with Social Work Values:





- The social work profession is built on values of social justice, dignity and worth of the person, and the importance of human relationships.
- Our licensure practices must reflect those values, not perpetuate structural inequities.

# LD 1298 - An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing

## Call to Action:

- Reform is not about lowering standards—it's about removing unnecessary and unjust barriers. Gatekeeping has no place in social work.
- We must act now to ensure our licensure process is fair, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse needs of our communities.
- As a profession rooted in justice, advocacy, and ethical service, social work must acknowledge the limitations and harm embedded in current licensure practices. Through data-informed advocacy, intentional legislative strategy, and a renewed commitment to our values, we have the opportunity to reshape licensure systems that truly reflect the standards and mission of social work.
- If Maine is serious about prioritizing the growth of a behavioral health workforce that also reflects and responds to the needs of our diverse communities, then we must act with the same courage, creativity, and compassion that we expect from those who answer the call to serve.

## The LD 1298 Alternative Pathways Model:

-  Beginning September 1, 2026 and ending May 1, 2031, all candidates must attempt the ASWB Exam at least once.
-  If the candidate does not successfully pass the ASWB exam, they can retake the exam, or,
-  Apply for licensure using the respective alternative pathway for their level of license.
-  Alternative pathways consist of a combination of requirements including additional years of supervised practice and competency-based evaluations of both social work education and practice.

**Reforming Maine's social work licensure process is not only an issue of fairness—it is a necessary step toward building a more inclusive and responsive social work workforce that reflects the values of our profession, ensures protection of the public, and meets the needs of our communities with integrity and care.**

