

August 11, 2020

Dwight Hymans
Chief Executive Officer
Association of Social Work Boards
VIA EMAIL: dhymans@aswb.org

Dear Mr. Hymans:

We are writing to express concern about the inability of new social work graduates to take the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Licensing Exam and get licensed during the COVID-19 pandemic in a timely and safe manner.

As you know, social workers, including clinical social workers (CSWs), are essential workers in the nation's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In numerous settings ranging from hospitals to nursing homes to child protection settings and more, they are providing urgently needed services. It is crucial to ensure a sufficient social work workforce during a pandemic, which is showing no signs of abating. Indeed, the end of this public health crisis maybe not just many months but years into the future, given the anticipated mental health crisis.

In addition, social workers, like millions of other Americans, are being hard hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic. Those who have recently graduated from social work programs, most of them with substantial student loan debts, are especially vulnerable to these impacts. Securing employment in their new profession is a priority not just for themselves but for their families. Most social work students have planned and worked toward the goal of not just earning their social work degree, but of earning licensure.

The delays in testing for the ASWB Licensing Exam are posing a barrier to urgently needed mental health services and to economic security for social workers in the many states that have not implemented exemptions to social work licensing requirements due to the pandemic. In Hawaii, no test dates are available until February 2021. A similar delay exists in New Jersey. In Colorado, no test dates are available until December. In the Pacific Northwest, no test dates are available until October. Employers in settings ranging from hospitals, treatment centers to mental health clinics to public child welfare agencies, and more are hiring. Indeed, social workers have received job offers but cannot move forward due to disruptions in testing and licensure. Often social workers without licensure cannot be hired or are underemployed because they lack the required license. State agencies nationwide have worked swiftly to ensure a sufficient healthcare workforce to fight the pandemic. Indeed, agencies across the country instituted emergency licensing policies to allow expedited and emergency licensure during the pandemic

to most healthcare professionals. The barrier to clinical services that the testing delays poses is counter to all of these efforts to ensure mental health and social care access.

First, we would like to know what ASWB and Pearson can do to ensure that test candidates can take the test timely as well as safely, given the risks of infection in indoor settings. We would like to know what measures are being taken to increase safety within testing sites. Also, we urge ASWB and Pearson to provide online in addition to in-person testing. Such testing is now available for the bar exam and numerous other types of similar multi-hour, complex licensure exams (such as insurance professionals).

Second, we would like to ensure that there is effective and timely communication between ASWB and Pearson to test candidates. We have received multiple reports of exams being cancelled (without notifying the customer). We also have received reports of candidates showing up to take their exam but on arrival at Pearson, not being able to locate the staff or the staff present not being aware that the person had signed up for the test. As of early July, the ASWB Candidate services number was not taking calls. Being able to reach ASWB staff via phone is especially important because emails are not getting responses.

Finally, we would like to ensure timely and effective communication between ASWB, Pearson, and NASW chapter executive directors regarding when testing in various states *will* be available or if there are anticipated delays in certain jurisdictions. Better communication will enable our Chapter executive directors to keep our membership better informed regarding testing availability. The state licensing boards do not appear to have specific information regarding testing availability, either.

We look forward to your response and to working with you to resolve these pressing concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angelo M. McClain".

Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW
Chief Executive Officer