Public Health Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5166 / Bill Status / Public Hearing Testimony
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL WORK LICENSURE.
Vote Date: 3/2/2026
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 2/18/2026
File No.: 23

Disclaimer: *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Social workers are essential to supporting individuals, families, and communities across the state in various settings such as schools, community agencies, and private practices. Licensed social workers provide mental health care, crisis intervention, case management, and advocacy services. The intent of this bill is to enact new legislation effective July 1, 2026, that would no longer require Master of Social Work graduates to take the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Master exam to become a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW). For the ASWB exam, candidates must first get approval by state boards to take the exam and then pay a $230 fee to take the exam. The ASWB exam is a 170-question, multiple-choice tests designed to measure entry-level social work competence. The exam covers human development, ethics, assessment, and intervention. The exam uses scenario-based questions to evaluate application of knowledge.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Sean Scanlon, State Comptroller, Office of the State Comptroller:
A primary obstacle the Office of the State Comptroller's Mental Health Subcommittee has identified is the current requirement for master-level social workers to pass a standardized exam. Said exam has been linked to significant racial and language-based pass-rate disparities. The rate of White individuals that pass the exam is 91% while the rate for African American individuals is only 52%. Passing this bill would eliminate a clear barrier, while maintaining rigorous requirements for a master's degree in social work. Other states such as Illinois have implemented legislation like this bill which led to over 7 times the amount of newly licensed social workers than before the legislation was implemented.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Emmeline Franklin, Public Policy and Advocacy Associate, Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance):
The Alliance is a statewide association of nonprofits helping communities with various services. The Alliance believes that the Association of Social Work Boards' exam creates barriers for recent graduates looking to enter the workforce. Ms. Franklin noted that the passing rate for people of color and older individuals is statistically less than that of other individuals that take the exam. PA 23-31 suspended the exam, but the suspension ended January 1 of this year, meaning graduates are once again required to take and pass this exam. It should be noted that professionals of similar clinical positions such as Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associates do not require a certification examination.

Emily McCave, Professor of Social Work, Quinnipiac University:
The Licensed Master Social Work (LMSW) exam delays individuals entering the workforce which contributes to the shortages. The LMSW exam also places financial burdens on Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates who must pay an exam fee and a licensure fee. If the graduates fail the exam, they must pay the exam fee every time they take it which places additional stress on their finances as they await their licensure. Furthermore, the exam is not an accurate measure of their competency, its more so a measure of how successful they are at taking a specific exam. MSW programs are rigorous and include internship experiences that total a minimum of 900 hours.

Kalagena Sullivan, Project Coordinator, The Child Health and Development Center (CHDI):
The exam has created barriers and disparities for qualified social workers who have completed accredited and rigorous programs. The disparities it causes contributes to mental health workforce shortages ultimately limiting access to culturally responsive care for Connecticut residents. Without the exam candidates would still be required to graduate from accredited programs, complete clinical hours, adhere to ethical codes, and remain accountable to state oversight.

Milagros Marrero-Johnson, Social Worker:
Ms. Marreo-Johnson shared that as a social worker and university staff member, for over two decades, she supports this bill and its ability to reduce inequities for Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates. Marrero-Johnson states that The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exam does not measure the level of someone's competency nor their preparedness to enter the workforce. Social workers are crucial to improving the mental health of many adults, teenagers, and children. However, workforce shortages and burnout already exist for social workers, passing this bill would help to address these problems.

46 additional testimonies were submitted in support of this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jennifer Henkel, Director of Regulatory Services, Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB):
Ms. Henkel explained that professional licensure rests on three complementary pillars: education, supervised experience, and examination. The examination portion is the only standardized component that is psychometrically validated and directly overseen by regulators. Long term policy licensure policy decisions will shape workforce quality, equity, and public protection for decades. 31 states including Connecticut have adopted the licensure exam. While demographic disparities in exam pass rates exist, ASWB states these reflect broader systemic inequities, not exam bias, and eliminating the exam would fail to address root causes while increasing subjectivity and inequity. ASWB urges rejection of HB 5166, asserting that permanently removing the exam would complicate regulatory oversight, diminish professional standing, and reduce trust in social work licensure.

Reported by: Abbygail Shaw **Date: March 11, 2026**