



House Committee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Representative Brenda Landwehr, Chair
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairperson Landwehr and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of HB 2340. This bill will authorize the Kansas State Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (KSBSRB) to issue temporary social work licenses to applicants who have met all requirements for licensure except for having graduated from a university whose education program is in Candidacy for accreditation through the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE).

There is a growing shortage of Social Workers in Kansas. According to the *National Association of Social Workers, Kansas Chapter*:

- There are only 4,933 (2019 data) social workers with LMSW and LSCSW level licensure;
- Kansas was “facing a shortage of trained mental health responders” even before the pandemic, which has only exacerbated the problem;
- “the majority of clinical specialist and master level social workers practice or live within the five largest urban counties” resulting in shortages especially impacting rural regions of Kansas.
- “Only 36% of social workers practicing in Kansas are licensed” – statement by Becky Fast, Kansas Chapter of NASW (January 6, 2023, KSBSRB Board Meeting)
- In addition, an NPR story in October 2022 exhorted that “Kansas ranks among the worst in the country on both mental illness and its treatment.” (KMUW, Rose Conlon, 10/17/22)

Issue #1: Kansas is behind the rest of the nation in failing to provide Temporary licensure for programs expanding education opportunities. There are at least four (4) universities in Kansas, including the University of Saint Mary, developing new programs and are in some stage of the accreditation process with CSWE. These schools are expanding their programs in order to meet the demand for licensed social workers in Kansas, as well as provide the modern technologies of online education. The CSWE candidacy-to-accreditation process is a rigorous one, and KSBSRB is aware of the stringent process in place to ensure schools meet quality standards of the CSWE. *Providing a Temporary licensing option for students graduating from these programs allows these programs to actively recruit and train the future social workers of Kansas.*

Issue #2: Kansas is losing social work students to universities and colleges in other states, including major online education programs. A graduate of a BSW or MSW program “in-candidacy” has met all the training requirements of CSWE and is competent to practice social work. In addition, under the Temporary license requirements outlined in the proposed statute, Kansas will still require passage of the ASWB licensure test by the graduate student, which is designed to test knowledge competency of the social worker. Thus, the proposal requires both the successful completion of the academic degree, as well as the national licensure exam. In addition, the temporary license does not become a permanent license if the university/college fails to meet accreditation, a third protection in the statute to protect Kansas citizens. As reported by the *National Association of Social Workers, Kansas Chapter*, the average amount of MSW graduate **loan debt** is \$45,080 (as of 2018). Social work practitioners have traditionally struggled with already low starting salaries as a profession, thus making loan debt even more burdensome. **Online education** has provided ways for universities to improve efficiencies and reduce the cost of MSW education. However, Kansas is limiting this level of innovation for its own Universities, *resulting in a competitive disadvantage to universities with online MSW programs in other states. Therefore, passing this statute will allow Kansas universities and colleges do be competitive in the market that are losing Kansas students to other states while also guaranteeing protections of quality, competent, and professional social workers practicing in the State.*

Issue #3: The CSWE Candidacy-to-Accreditation timeline takes approximately three (3) years, first being approved for Pre-Candidacy (eligibility payment and application), then a series of three annual benchmarks meeting quality standards (e.g. Mission, Curriculum, Field Education, Faculty, student life, etc.). Candidacy requires the hiring and approval of full-time, qualified social work faculty, and the development and teaching of social work curriculum in line with both CSWE and State standards. It is a large economic investment for Kansas universities, and these schools rely on student enrollment for revenue to balance out the expenses. If graduates of a program in Candidacy cannot obtain even temporary/provisional licensure, they will not enroll in the first place. If a Social Work program has limited enrollment, CSWE may not receive what it needs from the University to determine if the program has met the benchmark, and therefore placing full accreditation at risk [for example, a university social work program must report ‘assessment data’ based on student learning, but if there are no or few students, a program can only submit limited data]. Thus, lack of provisional licensure for students graduating from programs in Candidacy may actually impede a program getting full accreditation. *Providing a Temporary licensing option for students graduating from these programs allows these programs to actively recruit and train the future social workers of Kansas while achieving accreditation.*

Respectfully Submitted,



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