

Write About How The Licensure Process Has Impacted You!

Consider writing an op-ed, a letter to the editor, a guest column or a blog post to address an issue of concern for you. Have you had to change your career or job role because of the ASWB exam requirement or the cap on license renewals? Have you spent hundreds or thousands of dollars and countless hours to pass the ASWB exam? Maybe you're a supervisor or hiring manager for an agency and you've had trouble hiring competent candidates because of the shortage impacted by this unnecessarily unfair obstacle?

The more often social workers are seen as thoughtful commentators and experts in the media and online, the more likely public awareness of the profession's diverse practice roles will increase. The social work community and each of our communities at large are often disconnected from this particular issue in the field of social work and your story can help bring this to life.

If you're interested in sharing your story check out the NASW-Michigan's new Op-Ed Toolkit! You can also reach out to the Workforce Program Manager, Jordan Freeman, LMSW-Clinical at jfreeman.naswmi@socialworkers.org to assistance.

Op-Ed: Tips, Tools, and Strategies for Sharing Your Experience to Promote Positive Change

While we are currently working on legislation to create a new route to licensure that is more equitable and continues to promote the safety and professionalism of the social work profession, we are looking for stories from social workers who have been directly impacted by the current process and the obstacle of the ASWB exam specifically. If you are someone who has a story related to this and are willing to share it with NASW members and/or the greater community we hope this toolkit can help.

General Tips to Keep in Mind:

- Keep the entire length of your piece to between 750 and 850 words
- Active voice is appropriate for an op-ed. For example, "I hope Michigan will pass legislation to change the licensure process for social workers so that there is a path to licensure that does not require passing the ASWB exam"
- Start with a strong sentence or two and end with a similarly strong few sentences to wrap up
- Keep in mind sentence length - keeping your sentences short and concise will help get your points across
- Keep the goal in mind to help stay on track - your story is as intricate and special as you are so it can be hard to keep it concise. Remember - you're trying to support a certain perspective (for example - the inequitable obstacle of the ASWB exam) so when editing your story ask yourself - "does this paragraph / detail tie into the goal?"
- Consider communicating to your audience why they should care - for example, help readers understand that the greater community and people in need are at a loss because social workers like you have to leave the field when they are unable to pass this exam
- Avoid jargon - keep your points more straightforward
- It can be useful to briefly acknowledge the opposite opinion and why you feel it's incorrect. For example, "While many social workers may feel that the ASWB exam is necessary to give credibility to our profession, most social workers can agree that supervision is the most important part of developing competent, ethical professional identities."

Op-Ed: Rough Outline

- I. Introduction : interesting anecdote to draw your reader in and show them your voice - what makes you qualified to talk about the topic
- II. Thesis : state your argument
- III. Evidence : time to support your point! Provide 1-3 points and the evidence you have to support them; for example, maybe you are drawing from the ASWB data showing that it's not 'just you' that has struggled but actually a systemic problem with the exam, or maybe you cite Illinois's change in licensure pathways and the success they've had filling social work jobs since they made the licensure process more accessible
- IV. "To be sure" paragraph : draw your points back together concisely
- V. Conclusion : often this is where you circle back to your original anecdote or experience and try to end with a moving / inspiring last sentence or two - sometimes this is a call to action

Op-Ed : Questions to Get You Started

1. Tell readers what it means to be a 'social worker' - what education did you complete and what work experience have you had?
2. Tell readers about the licensure process - what are requirements in general and the costs associated with each requirement?
3. What has been your experience with the ASWB exam?
4. How has this experience impacted your career and your personal life?
5. What do you imagine the impact will be if legislation in Michigan passes and you are able to receive your full social work license?
6. What do you want readers to know about you and your experience that you haven't already shared above?

Op-Ed : General Background to Pull From

Are there other groups supporting this bill?

Some of the groups who slipped in support include the Michigan Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work, the Michigan Community Mental Health Association, Pontiac School District, Christ Child House, A Restored Outlook, Soaring Steps, Diversity Psychological Services, Boost Recovery Services, Brighter Health Counseling, Our Hope Association, Livingston County Community Mental Health, Stonecrest Center, BCA Stonecrest, NOAH Project Detroit, Wayne Pediatrics, Crestwood School District, Ascension Eastwood Recovery Center, Hope and Thrive Counseling and Therapeutic Services, Delta College, Elmhurst Home, Molina, Ask Health Care, Global Health and Human Services Consulting, My People Arise, Team Wellness Center, City on a Hill Health Clinical, and PACE of Southwest Michigan.

If Michigan wanted to join a social work compact in the future, does this prohibit it?

No, the social work compact allows states to set their own requirements for licensure and then allows social workers to take the ASWB test if they wish to apply for a multi-state license.

Will Licensed Master Social Worker be able to join insurance panels, bill for clinical services, etc.?

No, not independently. LMSWs working in clinical settings will be able to bill under a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, just as LLMSWs were able to bill under a LMSW previously.

Is this going to create increased liability for the supervisor?

No, the risk is the same. In Michigan, we currently allow limited licensed social workers to work under fully licensed social workers.

Is this going to create a public safety issue?

No. In fact, there is no data that shows the ASWB clinical exam has been successful at determining competency or protecting the public. On the contrary, by moving these individuals into licensed professions, the state will have oversight and regulatory authority over these professionals. This is something that is not happening now as many work in social work-like positions.

How does this affect social workers who have already passed the test and are licensed?

It doesn't—their license will remain the same. While there is a lot of misinformation being shared around creating an alternative to the clinical exam, the truth is that an existing LCSW will see no difference in their practice if an alternative to the clinical exam is created..

Has anyone else other than the National Association of Social Workers- Michigan Chapter, called for an alternative to the ASWB clinical exam?

Yes. Among the groups calling for an alternate path to licensure are the Council on Social Work Education, National Association of Black Social Workers, National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work, and Social Work and Hospice Care Network. Even ASWB is exploring alternate paths, although they have stated a desire to control that alternative rather than state policymakers.

Why not just reform the test?

There are national efforts to reform the test process which is created and administered by an outside entity (ASWB). As the test will remain and will likely be the main path to licensure, advocates and stakeholders have an interest in making sure the test is reformed. However, that process may take years and may never materialize. Furthermore, there is a general consensus (even by the testing body) that there needs to be

alternatives to the clinical exam to address bias, test anxiety, and accommodate individuals with language barriers.

Isn't testing the way we have always licensed Social Workers?

A growing body of thought is challenging traditional standardized testing as a measure of competence or success. In 2022, ASWB released its exam pass rates by race, age, and native English speaker demographics. This data shows significant disparities among racial and age groups. This confirms what has always been observed by social workers: these tests are flawed. Standardized testing as a primary way to measure a social worker's competence has its place, but it shouldn't be such a barrier to entering a social work career.