



The Latino Social Work Coalition and Scholarship Fund

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Input to the NYS Social Work, Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2018

Challenges – Shortage of Licensed, People of Color, Latino Social Workers

Thank you for giving us the opportunity for input to the Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2018. My name is Dilcia Granville, Ph.D., LMSW, and President of the Board of the Latino Social Work Coalition. On behalf of our members, we strongly support the clarifications provided in Part Y, and we expect a greater level of transparency. The Department must remain faithful to the original intent of the Part Y language.

In addition, we would like to present the real challenges facing our underserved community, and the shortages of cultural, competent, minority social workers in our Latino community. Many factors contributed to these shortages. One of the main reasons are the many obstacles to passing the social work exams for many minority, MSW graduates. Latinos have become the largest minority population in the United States. Estimates are that by the year 2050, nearly one-quarter of the U.S. population, or 102.6 million individuals, will be of Latino (U.S. Census Bureau). Latinos are at risk for various psychosocial maladies, including poverty, low educational attainment, mental health concerns, substance abuse, ill health, and exposure to violence. Consequently, the confluence of these factors, along with racism and systemic barriers for people of color, creates limited life opportunities for some Latinos.

Culturally competent social work practice with Latinos is crucial for ensuring effective access for and treatment delivery to this population.

On a social work practice level, the lack of available services for Spanish-speaking undocumented migrants is highly problematic. Clients are often forced to navigate complex systems of bureaucracy to meet their basic needs. The social welfare needs of clients may be left unmet without the availability of adequate numbers of Spanish-speaking social service providers who can assist them in negotiating these systems. The constrained social services provided to this population pose an ethical dilemma for social work professionals, whose code of ethics mandates the provision of services to vulnerable populations.

Social service agencies are experiencing high levels of attrition, and find it very difficult to recruit and retain culturally, competent, Spanish-speaking, social service providers. Spanish-speaking providers may have higher antecedents to attrition because of increased caseloads and less available resources, training and lack of adequate support and supervision.

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The shortage of social work students in the schools, exacerbates the shortage of potential social workers. Per the Council on Social Work Education (2007) statistics, only 7.1 percent of MSW graduates are Latinos. New York State is not alone; “every State is having this problem: We have a shortage of culturally competent or culturally appropriate social workers and representatives from communities of color. In 2008, Minnesota Board of Social Work recognized the shortage of minority social workers and the need to increase the number of minority social workers.”

In June 2008, the Minnesota Board of Social Work requested proposals to provide research data directed by a legislative mandate, as described below. The Request for Proposal (RFP) was specific to the second charge of the mandate only, as described in italics.

Minnesota Session Laws 2007 - Chapter 123, Section 133, Board of Social Work Study. *“The Board of Social Work shall study and make recommendations to the legislature by December 15, 2008, on how to increase the numbers of licensed social workers serving underserved communities and culturally and ethnically diverse communities. The study shall also explore alternative paths to licensure that does not include a standardized examination”.*

Consultant Recommendations: Based upon the research, the consultants recommend the following:
“One of Minnesota’s goals is to license more culturally competent or culturally appropriate social workers and representatives from communities of color.”

The Results: “Minnesota is not alone. The survey of ASWB members showed that 9 of 14 respondents (agencies) who discussed the issue in their surveys believe problems also exist in their jurisdictions. These include obstacles to licensing for candidates, and concerns that the number of licensed social workers in respective jurisdictions does not adequately represent their client communities. If the problem is correctly defined, then two paths to a solution can be considered. One is to give candidates more support in using traditional licensing procedures. The other is to develop alternative procedures.”

There is a shortage. Everyone that is not representative of the culture, and we need support to help that increase and find new alternatives to licensing. Alberta, British Columbia, allocated \$1.4 million to establish additional support systems in the medical profession for immigrants or others with qualifying degrees that lack the requisite test-taking skills in English.

Alternative methods are in place in British Columbia and Texas. British Columbia allows some groups to exempt social workers from registering with the province.

Texas has an alternative path to licensure for people who come very close to passing the ASWB exam, but who are unable to achieve a passing score. Another path to solving the current perceived problem might be to create new paths to a license, and to give more support to non-majority members, immigrants, or others who may need it before sitting for the exam.

The Latino Social Work Coalition strongly recommends that the New York State Board of Social Work adopt the same goals as the like Minnesota State Board of Social Work did - “One New York’s goal - is to license more culturally competent or culturally appropriate social workers and representatives from communities of color.”

And we further request reviewing and adopting the following recommendations, similar to the outcomes of the Minnesota State Board of Social Work’s study:

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1. Three alternatives for obtaining Social Work licensure:

(a) Texas, which has an alternative path to licensure for people who are unable to achieve a passing score on the ASWB exam; (b). British Columbia, which allows some groups to exempt social workers from registering with the province, which may not be optimal for public protection; and (c). Alberta, which has allocated resources to a new program that assist foreign-born healthcare workers into their healthcare provider network.

2. New York State Board of Social Work should acquire and analyze the psychometric item characteristics of the examination that is used for licensing. This review could help define the problem.

As noted, The ASWB was contacted, but the consultants were told no psychometric characteristics of items in the ASWB exam could be released. The State of California, in their review of the ASWB clinical exam, noted difficulty in obtaining this type of data, but was ultimately successful, New York State Board for Social Work should be able to do the same.

3. We recommend that the New York State Board of Social Work select up to 15 New York Counties, including the New York City Boroughs and ask them to specifically describe the effects of underrepresentation in their respective counties. Further documentation and definition of the problem itself will help to illuminate and refocus the solutions more assuredly or quickly. The problem of underrepresentation of various populations is a perceived, but undocumented, problem. It is, however, widely perceived having spawned not only two studies in the state of Minnesota, but also being suspected by 9 of 14 agencies responding to the survey on the ASWB listserv.

4. In implementing these recommendations, the New York State Board of Social Work should decide whether the resources required to effectively implement alternative methods would align properly with the scope of the problem.

- In terms of the content of the social work exam, credit for relevant experience should be given to social workers who failed the exam, and they should be grandfathered in, and a license provided.

5. The financial burden of retaking the test, another unbearable factor for minority and Latinos Social Workers, as the cost of the exam is very expensive. Many reported difficulties paying for the exam. We have several minority MSW graduates who have re-taken the Social Work exam up to 13 times. We found it unfair to take this exam 13 times and keep paying exam fees just to pass. Unfortunately, the record shows that repeat test takers are less likely to pass the licensure social work exam.

In addition, credit should be given for (a) passing parts of the exam; (b) the exam fee be reduced to only the parts that need to be retaken. For example, many minority MSWs complain that they had failed the Clinical part of the exam because their concentration was Community Organizing, when they were to re-take the exam, they paid for the entire exam.

In conclusion, passing the social work licensure examination is a critical part of the professional development of contemporary social workers. Social workers who fail the licensure exam are unable to apply to entry and middle level positions. For minority MSW graduates failing the social work exam carries larger consequences, causing dismissal and/or demotion from their agencies. This in term creates a gap of services for minority and Latinos families seeking assistance in these agencies. In many instances, the human services agencies are left without any minority or bilingual social workers, putting their clientele at risk.