

**Testimony of Scott French, Administrator, New York City Department of Social Services,
Human Resources Administration**

**Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Hearing
June 18, 2025**

Good afternoon. My name is Scott French and I serve as the Administrator of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) within the Department of Social Services (DSS). I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala, the members of the Committee on General Welfare and the bill sponsors for holding today's hearing.

I will speak to each of the introductions being heard today in turn. Highlighting important considerations and concerns we believe the sponsors, members of the Committee on General Welfare, the broader Council, and stakeholders should keep in mind in assessing and amending these introductions.

Introduction 1175

Introduction 1175, sponsored by Council Member Menin, would establish a program to provide domestic violence survivors with legal representation throughout a divorce proceeding. The Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) would be required to submit an annual report on the program to the Mayor and the Speaker of the Council.

Delivering services to survivors of domestic violence is incredibly important. Our City's network of Family Justice Centers, domestic violence shelters, and non-residential community services are critical components in providing lifesaving support. If anyone listening needs help, they can contact 311 or New York City's Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-621-4673 (HOPE).

As required by Local Law 5 of 2022, HRA convened a work group with the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) consulting with stakeholders, including legal services providers and domestic violence survivors. The work group provided important analytic grounding as the City began to think through the challenges posed by establishing a program to provide these legal services within the context of a 24-month pilot proposed in Local Law 5.

There are significant challenges in determining the scope of service provision required in this area. Readily available data along a number of dimensions important to provision of this kind of legal assistance are limited, including data on the number of contested matrimonial cases in New York City Supreme Court where one, or neither, party is represented by counsel, or the number of cases

related to domestic violence. That kind of data is important because it would inform contract design, crafting the appropriate contours of the contracts for legal service delivery such that City dollars would be focused on the individuals and types of cases that are most underserved.

Program design would also be informed by understanding, given a limited budget, whether it would be more important to focus on brief legal assistance or full representation, and if both, in what proportion for each.

An additional challenge the work group highlighted is the timeline of divorce proceedings. The most contentious divorce proceedings can take more than two years (impacted by factors like child custody, the complexity of property disputes, and the court's workload). Where providing full representation, the City would have to craft a program sensitive to the fact that it is irresponsible for a provider to drop a client in the middle of a contested divorce.

Conversations with OMB are ongoing with regard to funding Local Law 5 of 2022; LL5 serves as an important bridge to a potential broader legal services program for domestic violence survivors. While conscious of the boundaries of our capability to establish such a program in short order, the data limitations to program design and the fiscal implications of such a program, DSS remains aware of the impact a matrimonial legal services program could make in the lives of survivors of domestic violence. Alongside our ENDGBV and ACS partners, DSS stands ready to continue the conversation with the Council.

Introduction 791

Introduction 791, sponsored by Council Member Restler, would require DSS to post on its website each month data concerning vacant supportive housing units, including the total number and percentage of all supportive housing units in the city that are vacant, as well as the number of vacant units at different stages in the placement process. DSS would also be required to provide data beginning twelve months prior to the enactment of the law.

Transparency is an important goal and we are open to partnering with the sponsor and the Council to deliver timely, accurate data on vacant supportive housing units. There are significant aspects of the legislation we would want to discuss in further detail to achieve that goal. For instance, harmonizing this proposed report with existing reporting and methodologies for reporting on supportive housing vacancies would mean DSS would be able to deliver this report in a cost-effective manner. Aligning definitions across reporting already in place would allow for creation of a proposed report without having to fundamentally restructure logics, programming, and databases used to produce a report. Note that misalignment would result in a report that is onerous to produce, costly, and undeliverable in a timely fashion. Furthermore, looking at vacancy data in two different reports with different approaches could lead to confusion.

In this area, HRA would want to leverage the ongoing work of HRA's Office of Supportive / Affordable Housing and Services (OSAHS). The OSAHS team is committed to ensuring that supportive housing vacancies are monitored and filled quickly. OSAHS has developed sophisticated reports to review all vacancies in CAPS monthly. The occupancy rate for the OSAHS-referred units is 96.4%, and we feel these tools have been instrumental in the increase in

occupancy rate. The reports OSAHS creates are used to constantly monitor the system, identify issues, and implement interventions where needed.

Introduction 1208

Introduction 1208, sponsored by Council Member Gutiérrez, would require the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), in coordination with DSS, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), to issue a one-time report to the Mayor and the Speaker of the Council on the availability of air conditioning in homeless shelters. The report would detail which shelters have air conditioning, identify shelters with air conditioning only in some areas versus throughout the facility, specify the types of air conditioning systems used, highlight shelters that need air conditioning repair, and provide information on shelters that have installed air conditioning in the past 12 months or plan to do so within the next 12 months.

DHS recognizes the critical role that high-quality shelter facilities play in meeting client needs. DHS has expressed its commitment to phasing out operations in sites that no longer meet agency standards and transitioning to sites that better accommodate clients, continuously seeking to raise the bar in shelter quality and client care. As part of this ongoing commitment, DHS has issued an addendum to the current nonprofit social service provider open RFP that all new shelter sites include air conditioning. Currently, the majority of DHS sites have site-wide air conditioning or a cooling room, and this RFP addendum continues to build on our long-standing focus on enhancing shelter quality.

DHS recognizes the importance of transparency in this area and welcomes further dialogue with the sponsor and Council regarding Introduction 1208, specifically the granular level of detail required by the report and privacy challenges associated with the report. Introduction 1208 calls for the production of data on air conditioning at sites at a level of granularity that would pose serious challenges for DHS to produce. Given the size of the system and the diversity of air conditioning setups, DHS does not maintain a centralized tracking system of air conditioning repairs, as such maintenance is managed directly by individual shelter providers. However, DHS is kept informed of any major air conditioning (or heating) issues that impact shelter operations and clients.

Additionally, DHS has concerns regarding client privacy, confidentiality, and security related to the reporting requirements in Introduction 1208.

Two key factors underlay DSS' focus on privacy in direct or indirect shelter address disclosure. First, clients deserve to retain dignity during the time they are in shelter. Second, there are serious security considerations DSS must take into consideration on an ongoing basis with respect to shelters serving survivors of domestic violence and the potential for disclosure of their addresses.

Introduction 1232

Introduction 1232, sponsored by Council Member Banks, would require HRA to provide an automated text message or email notification upon the approval of an application for the

Emergency Assistance Grant Program pertaining to rental assistance. Such approval notification would be delivered to the tenant applying for assistance and the building owner or managing agent designated by the building owner to collect rental payments from the applicant, to the extent that such information is provided in the application. Notifications would include information on the monetary amount of the award via the emergency assistance grant, an estimated issuance date for the assistance, and the mode of delivery for the corresponding check.

Access HRA is a critical tool in informing clients about the status of their case. Clients may opt to go paperless and receive notification via Access HRA; otherwise, they will receive mail or mail and Access HRA notification updates as to the status of their cases. We have various concerns with Introduction 1232, including privacy, the use of text messages and email, and notice requirements. Given the outstanding privacy concerns, HRA does not support the Council moving forward with Introduction 1232 as drafted.

Conclusion

Thank you to the sponsors and Committee on General Welfare for considering these introductions. HRA, DSS, and DHS remain ready to continue even more detailed discussions on the concerns and considerations I have outlined here today.

I welcome your questions.



Testimony of

Coalition for the Homeless

before the Committee on General Welfare
of the New York City Council

on

Introductions 0791-2024, 1208-2025

submitted by

Alison Wilkey, Esq.

Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Campaigns
The Coalition for the Homeless

June 18, 2025

The Coalition for the Homeless (“Coalition”) is the court- and City-appointed independent monitor of the Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system and plaintiff in the historic *Callahan*, *Eldredge*, and *Boston* cases that created the right to shelter in NYC. We are actively engaged in assisting and defending the rights of homeless New Yorkers advocating for the resources needed to end mass homelessness by ensuring access to permanent housing. Our Keys Program supports single adults with mental illness and other disabilities, who are too often overlooked or ignored, helping them secure safe and stable housing. We work collaboratively with our clients through the lengthy and complicated process of applying for and locating placements in permanent supportive housing. This empowers them to be able to live with the same dignity that every human being deserves. Accordingly, we are uniquely situated to provide insight into the impact of the proposed legislation on shelter residents and those in need of supportive housing.

Introduction 1208-2025

Introduction 1208-2025 would require the City to assess the availability of air conditioning across the entire shelter system and issue a report to the Mayor and the Speaker of the Council. This data would be useful for understanding which shelters lack air conditioning, and what investments are needed to ensure that shelter residents are protected from the rising number of extreme heat events each year.

In 2024, DHS issued “Code Red” alerts on 18 separate days, including 14 Level 1 alerts and 4 Level 2 alerts. DHS issues Code Red Level 1 alerts any time the temperature reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher for one day or more or is forecasted to reach 95 degrees Fahrenheit or higher at any point for two consecutive days or more. Code Red Level 2 alerts are issued when forecasted temperatures reach 105 degrees or more Fahrenheit for any duration or are forecasted to reach 95 degrees Fahrenheit for four days or more. When a Code Red alert is issued, DHS conducts additional outreach to unsheltered people to encourage them to visit Drop-in centers or shelters with designated cooling areas.

Yet, for people residing in a shelter without air conditioning, there is no relief. While most shelters have air conditioning in some parts of the shelter, it is insufficient to meet the need. Residents should not need to sleep on cafeteria floors because it is the only part of the shelter that provides air conditioning in warmer months. Often, shelter residents are restricted to particular areas during different times of the day. From 9am to 5pm, congregate shelter residents are not allowed to be in their sleeping quarters unless they have a pass permitting them to rest in bed due to disability or work schedules. But these people may be sleeping in dormitories lacking air conditioning during the hottest part of the day.

According to data collected by the Coalition since Fall 2024 as part of our monitoring authority, only 48 percent of inspected shelters for families with children have air conditioning throughout the building. For shelters for adult families and single adults inspected during this period, 64 percent and 76 percent have air conditioning throughout, respectively. The Coalition does not have data for shelters that are not part of monitoring authority, such as domestic violence and youth shelters.

Homeless New Yorkers also have higher rates of disability than the general public, which creates particular hazards for people who face additional health risks in excessive heat; for example, people who take medication that increases sensitivity to heat, causes dehydration, and other side effects exacerbated by warm temperatures. The Coalition often works with shelter residents to make “reasonable accommodation” requests¹ for air conditioning, but those requests can take weeks or months to fill, during which time a person’s health is at risk. And despite DHS guidance to ensure people who experience disability-related heat sensitivity are provided air conditioning, Coalition staff frequently encounter clients who have not been provided these accommodations, disproportionately people with psychiatric disabilities.²

The Coalition supports Introduction 1208-2025, but urges that the report also require reporting on the number of reasonable accommodation requests related to air conditioning received by each agency, the number of those requests that were filled, and the length of time between the request and the fulfillment. The report required by the legislation should also be published and made available to the public.

Introduction 791-2025

Supportive housing for homeless individuals with mental illness and other disabilities is not only proven to provide long-term stability for the individuals housed, but it also saves taxpayers approximately \$10,000 per year in averted costs for shelters, emergency rooms, justice involvement, and other government agencies and services. However, there is currently only about one available supportive housing unit for every five people deemed eligible.

Despite the scale of the need, supportive housing units are sitting vacant. In January 2025, there were over 4,117 vacant supportive housing units, according to reporting from the *The City* based on data received pursuant to a FOIL request.³ That data showed that over 400 units that were designated as “online” and available had been sitting empty for a year or more. More than 700 units have been “offline” for more than a year.

In the Coalition’s experience, some supportive housing units simply do not meet the needs of those seeking supportive housing, which may explain why some units are vacant for long periods of time. For example, some units are designed to be shared by two people, which may be neither appropriate nor desirable for people with psychiatric disabilities. Some units have been online for decades and need renovations. In some cases, the supportive housing provider takes 70 percent of the resident’s income, as opposed to the standard 30 percent contribution toward rent, which

¹ Under the stipulation of settlement in *Butler v. City of New York*, DHS must provide shelter placements that meet the needs of homeless New Yorkers with disabilities or other functional needs, referred to as “reasonable accommodations.”

² *Heat Sensitivity Fact Sheet*, New York City Department of Homeless Services, 31 Jul 2020. Available at: <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HEAT-SENSITIVITY-FACT-SHEET.8.13.20.pdf>.

³ Hogan, Gwynne. “Most Street-Homeless Housing Applicants Never Get a Shot, inside Stats Show.” *The City*, 6 Jan. 2025, www.thecity.nyc/2025/01/06/homeless-supportive-housing-eric-adams-statistics/.

does not leave people with enough resources to care for their basic needs. Furthermore, the eligibility for supportive housing is spread across multiple funding streams with 46 distinct eligibility criteria. To fully understand any underlying issues that might be contributing to long-term vacancies, it is essential to know the characteristics and conditions of the units, in addition to the applicable funding stream(s) and eligibility criteria.

It should also be noted that the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (“CAPS”) does not include all supportive housing in New York City. CAPS contains approximately 36,000 units⁴ out of the 40,452 units in New York City.⁵ Reporting that relies only on those units in CAPS will not capture the full picture of vacancies.

Coalition would further recommend that the bill language use the terms currently in use in the CAPS system to describe unit vacancies: In Process (Referral, Pending TCO, and Linked), Not in Process, Offline, and No Unit.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Council to address the important issues that are the subject of these introductions.

About Coalition for the Homeless

The Coalition, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to address the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fifth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 12 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-training for homeless and low-income women; and permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition’s mobile soup kitchen distributed nearly 400,000 hot, nutritious meals to homeless and hungry people on the streets of the city this past year – up from our usual 320,000. Finally, our Crisis Services Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work

⁴ *Local Law 3 Reporting on Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) Fiscal Year 2024*. New York City Human Resources Administration. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/news/HRA-Local-Law-3-CFY2024-08272024.pdf>. Accessed 16 June 2025.

⁵ “The State of Supportive Housing 2024.” Supportive Housing Network of New York, 2024, shnny.org/what-we-do/advocacy-policy/state/state-of-supportive-housing-sosh/. Accessed 16 June 2025.

uniforms, and money for medications and groceries. In response to the pandemic, we are operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right-to-shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981, the City and State entered into a consent decree in *Callahan* through which they agreed: “The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter.” The *Eldredge* case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The *Callahan* consent decree and the *Eldredge* case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed independent monitor of municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor the municipal shelter system serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by the Legal Aid Society and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws. During the pandemic, the Coalition worked with the Legal Aid Society to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure Wi-Fi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic.



Supporting the Social Work Workforce Act Resolution 362-A

NYC Council Joint Budget Hearing (June 18, 2025)

Written Testimony from Equality New York

I would like to thank the Joint Budget Committee for holding this hearing. My name is Amanda Babine and I proudly serve as the Executive Director of Equality New York, the largest LGBTQ+ Advocacy Organization. I am also a proud social worker, holding both a BSW and MSW, along with being a member of the Social Workers for Justice.

I am testifying today **in support** of Resolution 362-A, which is in support of the Social Work Workforce Act. This legislation would eliminate the entry-level ASWB licensing exam as a condition for licensure because of its long-standing and national extreme racial biases in pass rates and that it lacks any evidence that it scientifically measures the competence of social workers.

At Equality New York, we understand the importance of Social Workers and their role in our communities. The current licensing exam is a major barrier to getting more social workers into our organizations and neighborhoods. Majority of New Yorker's who rely on social workers are people and communities of color, however, such a small percentage of social workers themselves are BIPOC.

I submit this testimony in support of the Resolution 362-A submitted by Council Member Bottcher, and the state-wide equivalent, Social Work Workforce Act, sponsored by Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Amanda Babine

Executive Director, Equality New York



Testimony: Rachel L. Braunstein, Director of Policy
Hearing: Int. 1175-2025
Host: Committee on General Welfare
Date: June 18, 2025

Thank you, Chair Ayala and the Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this critical matter. I am Rachel Braunstein, the Director of Policy at Her Justice, a nonprofit organization that has advocated with and for women living in poverty in New York City for more than 30 years. Her Justice provides free legal assistance to women living in poverty in New York City through a “pro bono first” approach. We train, mentor, and support volunteer attorneys to address the individual and systemic legal needs facing our clients. Since our founding in 1993, Her Justice has assisted tens of thousands of New Yorkers. In 2024, Her Justice provided a range of legal help to more than 4,000 women and their children in our practice areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. Among the clients served, 92% are women of color and 85% are survivors of domestic violence. Three-fourths of our clients were born outside the U.S., coming from 103 countries across the world.

Her Justice applauds the Council for recognizing through Int. 1175-2025 the value of legal representation in divorce, a complex and important civil proceeding for many survivors of domestic violence. The Council has long supported Her Justice in our work on behalf of women living in poverty who need representation in divorce, and we thank the Council for recognizing the need for more resources through the proposal. We are grateful for the opportunity to raise some additional considerations for making the proposal as effective and sensitive to the needs of survivors as possible.

The True Cost of Lawyering in Divorce Cases

Her Justice, along with our pro bono partners, provides legal advice and representation to hundreds of women seeking a divorce each year. Engaging in a formal legal process for divorce is especially important for women who are typically the lesser-earning spouse given the protections available in that process. The legal process should ensure a fair child or spousal support award which gives single mothers a critical safety net, and an equitable distribution of marital property and debts.

Her Justice and our pro bono partners provide legal representation to clients, including survivors of domestic violence, in both uncontested and contested or litigated divorces. In a Supreme Court matrimonial case, clients may seek additional or ancillary relief such as custody of minor children, safe visitation arrangements, child support and health insurance for children, spousal maintenance or alimony, equitable distribution of marital property or debt, and/or orders of protection. Uncontested divorces do not require litigation on ancillary issues and are often resolved based on the submission of forms to the court. There is significant demand for this relief in New York: in 2024, there were 38,746 uncontested matrimonial cases filed in New York Supreme Courts, comprising 12% of all Supreme Court filings that year.¹

Contested divorces are inherently high stakes, demanding extensive legal work to uncover assets and secure equitable distribution for clients, along with negotiation or trial advocacy. These cases typically last months if not years. In New

¹ N.Y. Unified Court System, 2024 Annual Report, at 60 (2024), https://www.nycourts.gov/whatsnew/pdf/24_Annual_Report.pdf.



York, while the right to counsel in divorce cases extends to certain issues, such as child custody and orders of protection, it notably *excludes* the financial aspects of a divorce. Generally, legal representation in these complex cases can be incredibly costly and for many, it is simply unaffordable. Research shows that the average cost of divorce in New York is substantial, at an overall average of \$13,835, rising to \$18,853 for cases involving children and \$12,401 for those without. (These figures are higher than the nationwide average divorce cost of \$11,300, which breaks down to \$15,500 for child-related disputes and \$10,100 without children.) The out-of-reach cost of legal representation creates a significant disadvantage for many individuals, especially those with limited income, in achieving a fair financial settlement through divorce.

Her Justice takes a flexible approach to financial eligibility for our services, acknowledging that the Federal Poverty Line – \$26,650 for a family of three in 2025 – fails to capture the immense financial struggle of tens of thousands of New Yorkers who live with resources at or above this line. We engage in a well-informed and sensitive intake process around eligibility for services, which also takes into account that many survivors of domestic violence suffer coercive financial control in marriage and do not have access to marital assets. These practices ensure that a broader range of survivors, along with clients who are not victims of abuse, can access critical support.

Her Justice’s legal services fill gaps. We recognize that the need for divorce representation far outstrips the supply of help. Her Justice’s pro bono first model helps fill the “civil justice gap” – the distance between the number of Americans who need civil legal assistance and the few who receive help given inability to afford legal assistance and resource constraints on the availability of free legal help. Our attorneys and partners consistently achieve favorable outcomes for our divorce clients. **Between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024, Her Justice resolved 43 litigated divorces in which attorneys secured a total of \$637,847 in lump sum awards and \$55,508 in monthly support payments.**

Even beyond successful outcomes in litigation, Her Justice is committed to providing legal services to women living in poverty because these services ensure stability in other areas of life. To measure the impact of our legal services, our team conducted a preliminary return on investment analysis based on data from April 2023 to March 2024. For these calculations we used Her Justice client data across our various legal service areas, along with publicly available datasets used by other legal organizations to calculate the value of their services. During this period, Her Justice received \$6.8 million in funding from state and local government, donations, and private foundations. We calculated the following benefits flowing from that investment:

- Pro bono attorneys representing Her Justice clients were able to secure \$3.5 million in lifetime child and spousal support awards.
- For immigration clients served, increased wages will result in a benefit of \$10 million.
- Clients leaving abusive partners will see a one-year benefit of \$3.7 million in reduced health and mental health costs associated with an average of seven physical assaults per federal health and intimate partner violence statistics.
- Clients who had a successful case outcome during this period and their children will see a five-year improved health benefit of \$7.4 million.

When added together, the total benefit for clients who had successful case outcomes during this period equals \$24.6 million.



A High Percentage of Divorce Clients Are Domestic Violence Survivors

A fair divorce can be especially critical for victims of domestic violence, for whom financial stability is key to remaining free from abuse. **Among Her Justice matrimonial clients whose cases were resolved in 2023-2024, 69% reported experiencing domestic violence in their marriage.** Divorce can be especially complex for survivors of domestic violence. In determining child custody and visitation, the divorce court considers a family's history of domestic violence in making safe parenting access arrangements. A survivor may also seek an order of protection in a divorce, including an order seeking exclusion of the abusive spouse from the marital home. In addition to the physical, sexual, and psychological health consequences of domestic violence it is well documented that partner violence frequently involves financial abuse that threatens the survivor's economic security and potential for self-sufficiency. Economic abuse is prevalent among survivors of domestic violence, with research showing that almost all have suffered some form of it. Survivors in divorce proceedings seek legal help to address the consequences of economic abuse, including in terms of damaged credit and unintended or coerced debt. Coerced debt is "all nonconsensual, credit-related transactions that occur in a violent relationship" including abusers "taking out credit cards in their partners' names without their knowledge, [] forcing victims to obtain loans for the abuser, [and] tricking victims into signing quitclaim deeds for the family home."² The consequences of these actions are dire. Coerced debt can not only impact a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship but can have a long-term impact on employment, housing, overall financial security, and even food security.

Complex legal issues require the services of expert counsel. As part of our suite of holistic legal services and to address the impact of financial abuse, Her Justice has developed expertise in coerced debt, identity theft, and financial abuse, highly recognized by the New York legal community. In addition to the legal representation described here, we provide essential information, advice, brief services, referrals, and financial advocacy across all our family and divorce cases. We run credit reports for 100% of our family and matrimonial clients to identify any additional financial services they may need. These legal services are crucial for creating stability, safety, autonomy, and a sense of freedom in our clients' lives. At Her Justice, we are committed to advocating for the full recognition of the economic realities of domestic violence within the law and in the courts, ensuring comprehensive redress for survivors.

The Need for a Trauma-Informed and Cross-Trained Approach to Divorce Representation

Her Justice attorneys often work with clients who have experienced severe and repeated traumatic events. These events impact the way the clients see themselves, the world, and others. They often have difficulty trusting and sharing information with other people; this can be a massive roadblock to an attorney who is trying to assist them in their legal case. By understanding and incorporating a trauma-informed framework, our attorneys can ethically and effectively manage their relationship with clients and build an active partnership. Assigned 18B lawyers in New York City, while crucial for indigent defense, often lack the specialized training and resources that dedicated domestic violence lawyers possess. Primarily focused on general criminal and family court matters, 18B attorneys may not have the deep understanding of trauma, the specific dynamics of abuse, or the intricate interplay of civil and criminal legal remedies unique to domestic violence cases and especially the impact of financial abuse. Without proper training, legal

² See Angela Littwin, *The Role of Consumer Debt in Domestic Violence*, 100 Calif. L. Rev. 951, 954 (2012).



professionals risk retraumatizing clients, misinterpreting behavior, or overlooking critical safety and access-to-justice concerns. Trauma-informed lawyering enhances trust, improves communication, and leads to more equitable and sustainable legal outcomes for survivors.

Immigration status plays a role in divorce. At Her Justice, we understand that unstable immigration status significantly increases the need for trauma-informed care for our clients. Our immigration practice offers free legal assistance to undocumented immigrants who have experienced domestic violence, sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence, helping them stabilize their immigration status in the United States. Her Justice attorneys directly represent clients and mentor pro bono attorneys in a range of immigration matters, including VAWA self-petitions, U and T nonimmigrant status petitions, applications to adjust status, waivers of the joint petition to remove conditions on residence, naturalization applications, and employment authorization applications. Last year, our attorneys provided legal information, advice, and representation on 2,058 immigration matters, securing legal status for 802 clients and their children. Immigration status is a common concern among our clients, including those seeking help with divorce and family matters. Our attorneys are cross-trained and have legal expertise in the ways that immigration status impacts domestic violence and economic stability for our clients, including through successful divorce representation.

The Value of Data on Domestic Violence in Divorce Cases

The Council's efforts behind Int. 1175 create an opportunity to assess the extent of need and resources for divorce representation for domestic violence survivors in New York City. In addition to the metrics outlined in Int. 1175, it would be valuable to collect court data to inform implementation of the proposal. Despite the ubiquity of civil justice problems involving the essentials of life and the substantial number of divorce cases, there is scant publicly available data about what happens in the New York courts. There is further a **data gap around domestic violence in divorce**, including the prevalence of domestic violence in divorce cases and experiences and outcomes for survivors in divorce. Inadequate investment in collecting and reporting on court data to illustrate the nature and extent of civil justice problems makes it more challenging to enact policy to improve the court experience and outcomes, and to optimize the functionality of the courts.

Her Justice is deeply committed to exploring the power of civil justice data to inform sound policy change. We have developed expertise in conducting original research to build civil justice data collections and leverage these to support reform, including on family law issues that are involved in many divorce cases. In 2021, Her Justice released our first policy research report, [*Towards Justice for Parents in Child Support Courts*](#), which presented an analysis of 800 court observations in New York City child support cases and recommendations for Family Court reform. In November 2024, Her Justice launched our newest policy research project, [*Report From Court*](#), which surveys pro bono attorneys representing Her Justice clients in New York City Family Court about their experiences and case outcomes, and presents survey data in real time on a website. By making visible the Family Court experience and the perspectives of pro bono attorneys, *Report From Court* aims to fill a critical gap in Family Court data and support meaningful reform.

To address the data gap on domestic violence and divorce, we propose that any programming around legal representation for survivors in New York City include an effort to collect court data in addition to the metrics outlined in Int. 1175. Legal



services organizations have rich data around the services they provide, which illustrates the strong need for more resources for survivors in divorce. At the same time, we urge the Council to pair its proposal with an effort to collect data from the Office of Court Administration to more broadly illustrate the needs of survivors in divorce in New York City and point towards the most effective solutions.

Policy Recommendation

The City Council should **implement a fully funded *pilot program* focused on legal representation for domestic violence survivors in divorce** in partnership with expert legal services organizations and leverage the pilot to evaluate the most effective way to expand legal services for survivors in divorce in New York City.

The pilot program should:

- **Provide adequate funding:** Fully fund the pilot program to support legal services organizations with expertise in working with domestic violence survivors and a proven track record of effectively serving survivors. Funding levels should be adequate in light of the complexity and cost of divorce representation.
- **Invest in trauma-informed providers:** Encourage and fund partnerships with organizations with holistic and trauma-informed service models because it is crucial that lawyers representing domestic violence survivors in divorce understand the systemic barriers that complicate survivors' legal needs such as immigration status or coerced debt.
- **Include evaluation and data collection:** Evaluate the pilot program by collecting data around legal services for survivors in divorce as set forth in Int. 1175 and collect additional data, for example, around prevalence of domestic violence among divorce litigants in New York City (including by assessing temporary and final orders of protection for litigants in both uncontested and contested cases); rates of representation for divorce litigants; demographics of divorce litigants; divorce cases where the court considers domestic violence and in particular economic abuse in equitable distribution awards; and divorce cases where the court considers domestic violence in custody cases.

A pilot program will not only address the immediate legal needs of domestic violence survivors but will help make the civil justice system more equitable and responsive to urgent needs.



Thank you for the longstanding support for Her Justice and our commitment to serving women living in poverty. We thank the Council for recognizing the need for more resources for survivors seeking divorce through Intro. 1175, and we are grateful for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We look forward to continuing to partner with the Council on this proposal and improving legal services and outcomes for our clients and all New Yorkers in need.

Respectfully,

Rachel L. Braunstein, Esq.
Director, Policy
rbraunstein@herjustice.org



HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

5 HANOVER SQUARE, 9TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10004
www.HSUnited.org

Testimony for June 18, 2025 General Welfare Hearing

June 18, 2025

My name is Victoria Leahy, and I am the Director of Policy & Planning at Homeless Services United. Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing over 50 mission-driven, homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for the expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers. Homeless Services United promotes effective solutions to end the crisis of homelessness in New York City.

Int 1208

We firmly believe that clients in shelter deserve high quality facilities. However, our concern lies in the aging infrastructure of many shelters. While it may seem simple to install AC window units or add additional cooling tech, our providers report aging electrical grids that simply cannot handle adding a window unit to each room. We push for greater capital funding in our shelter system, so that providers can update their facilities to be safer, sustainable, and more comfortable to clients.



2025 Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare.

June 18, 2025

Testimony of Kim Moscaritolo, State Policy Director for Hunger Free America

I am honored to submit this testimony today on behalf of the estimated 1.2 million city residents who are struggling against hunger.

New Yorkers still face massive hunger and food insecurity crises citywide, and we need a massive response from the City, especially one that focuses on increasing participation in the federally-SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and new summer EBT programs. Given the massive funding cuts proposed, and in some cases already implemented, by the federal government, it is more important than ever that New York City step up and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to ample nutritious food by adequately funding anti-hunger initiatives.

In recent weeks, the House passed, and the Senate proposed, a budget bill that would slash the main U.S. domestic food assistance program by \$300 billion in order to pay for a new round of tax cuts that would most greatly benefit the wealthiest Americans. The cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – formerly called the Food Stamp Program – would reduce benefits for all 41 million participants in the program, the vast majority of whom are children, working people, seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans. In March, the USDA cut a billion dollars of funding to purchase food from local farmers for schools and food banks.

Background on The Current State of Hunger In New York City

According to raw USDA data analyzed by Hunger Free America:

Across New York City, 14.3% of the population, or 1.2 million people, lived in food insecure households between 2021 and 2023. The Bronx is New York City's hungriest borough in terms of prevalence, with 19.1% of residents (227,086 people) living in food insecure households. Queens contains the highest number of individuals living in food insecure households, reaching

310,310 people between 2021 and 2023.

Nearly one out of every five children (18.6%) in New York City experiences food insecurity, while almost one third (32.2%) of children in the Bronx are food insecure. Food insecurity among employed adults increased slightly between 2021 and 2023, reaching 10.4%. The number of food insecure older New York City residents increased to 213,143 between 2021 and 2023.

At the same time, hundreds of thousands of City residents eligible for federally funded benefits do not receive them. The best under-participation estimates that we have for SNAP that are official are old (for 2018, pre-pandemic). For technical reasons we would be glad to discuss, we believe USDA's estimates, even in 2018, undercounted those who are eligible but did not then receive SNAP. But even if USDA's numbers were correct, that still meant that 1 in 10 people overall, 25 percent of working people, and 30 percent of older New York State residents who were eligible for SNAP did not get it. The percentages are likely even higher for the City than the State as a whole.

As for federally funded WIC benefits (for pregnant women and children under five), as of 2021, USDA estimated that whopping 45 percent of the pregnant women and children under five eligible for WIC statewide did not get it. Unlike SNAP, WIC has no immigration restrictions in the program and has slightly higher income eligibility than SNAP, so this under-participation in WIC is especially harmful. The percentages are likely even higher for the City than the State.

As for steps the City can take to fight hunger, we have six recommendations:

- Increase funding to nonprofit groups (including Hunger Free America) that increase access to government food benefits through the NYC Benefits program and direct City Council funding.
- Accelerate the City's promised work to create a MyCity portal to allow application for multiple benefits.
- Urge the State to end the sub-minimum wage for tipped food service workers.
- Enact and fund a SNAP-like program, to be funded by the City, to give extra grocery funds to immigrants and working poor New Yorkers who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits. California recently started such a program.
- Ensure that all classes in all New York City public schools provide either in-classroom school breakfasts or grab and go breakfast in their hallways. Currently, New York City has the lowest school breakfast participation rate out of any big city school system in the United States, with 55.4 percent of kids who get school lunches failing to get school breakfasts.
- Work with nonprofit groups to launch a comprehensive outreach and enrollment campaign to ensure robust participation in the new Summer EBT program.

We also suggest that the Council formally endorse the Congressional and State HOPE bills which would make it easier for people to apply for multiple benefits online and enable low-income families to develop assets by being able to buy a first home, start a small business, or save to pay for higher education or retirement.

We hope you can take all or some of these actions rapidly. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



**MET
COUNCIL**

Feeding the hungry. Serving the poor.
Changing lives.

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Chair Ayala and fellow members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare,

Thank you for holding this hearing. We are writing testimony on behalf of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) in support of introductions of Local Laws 1175 and 1232, and Resolution 0839. Local Law 1175 provides legal representation to survivors of domestic violence throughout divorce proceedings. Local Law 1232 requires automatic written communication via text or email upon approval for Emergency Rental Assistance Grants, and Resolution 0839 calls on the NYS Legislature to pass A03578/S00403, which would establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims' compensation fund. All three of these proposals would create meaningful change in the lives of the individuals Met Council serves.

For over 50 years, Met Council has been America's largest Jewish charity dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments, including the country's largest kosher and halal emergency food network, 100% affordable housing, benefits access, senior programming, crisis intervention, and to our award-winning family violence program. Met Council provides a wide array of support to over 320,000 New Yorkers annually, including those with religious dietary restrictions.

One in three women and one in four men in the United States have experienced intimate partner violence in their lives.¹ In New York City, the prevalence of domestic violence has steadily increased since 2020.² Not all survivors of domestic violence are married, and of those that are, not all choose to pursue divorce. However, for those that do, the current system does them a disservice. Presently, survivors of domestic violence are not guaranteed counsel throughout the divorce process. Organizations like Met Council often work with survivors to obtain counsel, but divorce proceedings are long and involved, and we have seen time and time again that there are not enough attorneys working with legal aid organizations to meet the needs of survivors.

Local Law 1175 would provide legal representation to victims of domestic violence throughout their divorce proceedings. This is particularly important for survivors of financial abuse, who often have limited financial resources, by ensuring that they are fairly represented against their abuser.³ The need for domestic violence services in New York City continues to rise and it is essential that the city take action to support survivors in their pursuit of safety and sustainability.⁴

Nearly 40% of New Yorkers are cost burdened because of their housing, meaning that they spend 30% or more of their income on housing.⁵ As the cost-of-living crisis in New York City continues to worsen, any unexpected expense can result in delayed rent payments. Emergency Rental Assistance Grants can be a lifeline for New Yorkers. However, Met Council's clients routinely face long wait times for approvals for these grants. Any delay in approval or notification can put a family's housing at risk.

¹ (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October, 2022, "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence")

² (Office of the New York State Comptroller, October, 2023, "Domestic Violence: Recent Trends in New York")

³ (L. Johnson, Y. Chan, A. Stylianou, A. Arnold, May 19 2022, "Examining the impact of economic abuse on survivors of intimate partner violence: a scoping review")

⁴ (Office of the New York State Comptroller, October, 2023, "Domestic Violence: Recent Trends in New York")

⁵ (Office of the New York State Comptroller, February 14 2024, "DiNapoli: Housing Cost Burdens for New Yorkers Among Nation's Highest")

Local Law 1232 requires a text message or email to be sent automatically upon approval for Emergency Rental Assistance Grants. While this law will improve the process and ensure more New Yorkers receive their rental assistance in a timely manner, this improvement would not solve the problem entirely. Our clients routinely experience delays throughout the application and approval process. They have no way of tracking their applications and will often be forced to submit more than once due to processing errors. Additional process improvements for tracking Emergency Rental Assistance Grant applications are essential to our clients and other New Yorkers experiencing similar financial crises. Local Law 1232 is a step in the right direction, but more must be done to support New Yorkers in need of rental assistance.

There are approximately 1.75 million recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in New York City.⁶ SNAP is a vital program that New Yorkers depend on to feed their families. SNAP benefit theft through electronic skimming of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards has become a pervasive issue. Our clients will go to use their SNAP benefits at a grocery store only to find that their benefits have been stolen and they no longer have money for groceries. A variety of processes have been implemented to attempt to prevent these thefts, such as the ability to freeze EBT cards between uses but they are often technologically complex and place a heavy burden on SNAP recipients.

Resolution 0839, which calls on the NYS Legislature to pass A03578/S00403, would establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims' compensation fund. Through the end of 2024, victims of SNAP skimming could apply to have stolen benefits replaced by the federal government, but for the last six months, that is no longer the case. Since December, Met Council alone has provided more than \$14,000 in emergency assistance to 57 households because of stolen SNAP benefits. The creation of a NYS compensation fund for victims of SNAP skimming would be a powerful step toward ensuring that New Yorkers are able to use their SNAP benefits. It is also essential that widespread change is implemented to prevent SNAP skimming and fraud in the first place. In January, California transitioned EBT cards to chip technology to prevent fraud. Other states, like Oklahoma, are now following suit. To truly protect New Yorkers from SNAP fraud, NYC Council should call on the NYS legislature to transition all EBT cards to chip cards.

We thank you for taking the time to review our testimony, and we hope to continue to work with this committee and the City Council to better meet the needs of all New Yorkers.

Thank you,



Dickran Jebejian
Director of Policy
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

⁶ (Office of Research and Policy Innovation, NYC Department of Social Services, February 2025, "A SNAP Shot of Enrollment and Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program on New York City")



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL HEARING

before the

Committee on General Welfare

on

Wednesday, June 18th at 1:00PM

Testimony By: Jonathan Chung, MPA

Director of Public Policy & Advocacy

National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC)

Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, and members of the Committee. My name is Jonathan Chung, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, or NAMI-NYC. Thank you for holding today's important hearing.

We are grateful to you, Speaker Adams, and the entire City Council for recognizing the growing mental health crisis in New York City, and for working in a comprehensive manner to try and address this issue. Even with the work that has been done to date, much more still needs to be done to address the gaping holes in our mental healthcare system. In addition to the many operational and funding gaps, a major issue plaguing the behavioral health community is a depleted and overworked workforce. We are currently experiencing a shortage of social workers, depriving many New Yorkers of the community-based, culturally competent care that they need. Factors such as low pay, high caseloads and increasing burnout are significant reasons for these shortages. Another reason? A biased licensing exam.

Many New Yorkers have completed their Master of Social Work, yet struggle to pass the third party written LMSW exam. The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), who administer these exams, own data shows that there are glaring racial and age disparities in pass rates for the exam, particularly amongst black and older test takers when compared to their white and younger counterparts.

New York State requires an exam to obtain an LMSW, but the current test that is in place is no longer an adequate way to measure if someone is prepared for the field. This has a direct impact on our community members and the services and supports that are more difficult to access when

we are lacking the necessary amount of professionals like social workers- especially social workers who understand and share similar backgrounds to the people they would be serving.

There are many people who have completed their coursework and fieldwork and want nothing more to do than serve their community and work in their chosen field. The exam that currently exists presents an artificial barrier to these ambitions.

There are several states in the nation that do not require a licensing exam. One of those states, Illinois, can be a good case study on how removing the licensing exam can positively impact the workforce shortage. In 2021, recognizing the glaring racial and age disparities in the test, the Illinois State Legislature passed and the Governor signed legislation to abolish the exam. By the end of 2023, the Illinois chapter of the National Association of Social Workers reported that more than 10,000 new social workers entered the workforce during that time.

NAMI-NYC is a proud member of the Social Workers for Justice Coalition. We joined the call in advocating for the passage of the Social Worker Workforce Act (A.701/S.988) in the State Legislature. We join them and Council Member Bottcher today to support the passage of City Council Resolution 362-A, urging the New York State Legislature to enact this important piece of legislation on the state level to significantly address the workforce shortage crisis we are experiencing.

Thank you again to the Committee for your consideration of our testimony. We appreciate all your efforts, and we look forward to continuing doing this important work together and being a resource to you all.

Testimony of Dr. Shakira A. Kennedy
Executive Director, NASW-New York
In Support of Resolution 362-A – Social Work Workforce Act
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Good afternoon, members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Dr. Shakira A. Kennedy, and I am a licensed social worker (LMSW) and the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers–New York, representing both upstate and downstate regions. Our association serves over 9,000 social workers across the state.

Today, I offer testimony on behalf of our membership and the NASW-NY Board of Directors in strong support of Resolution 362-A, the Social Work Workforce Act. For the past three years, this legislation has been a top priority of our Advocacy and Government Relations Committee and has received full endorsement from our member-led board.

We support this resolution because we have heard—and many of us have lived—the stories of those demoralized and discouraged by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) licensure exam. Whether they ultimately passed or failed, the experience is too often marked by anxiety, fear, and financial burden.

Many test-takers report doing everything "right": enrolling in prep courses, studying extensively, and taking the exam early—only to fall short of passing by a few points. One test-taker described the exam as *"bogus,"* expressing disbelief at failing multiple times despite rigorous preparation and calling it *"a profit-making machine."* Another shared: *"I failed my exam for the third time... I feel stupid and hopeless... It's like ASWB doesn't want you to pass."* These sentiments are not isolated—they are far too common. The cost of taking the exam can exceed \$800 when factoring in multiple attempts, study materials, and test prep services—an expense that disproportionately affects social workers who are not paid adequately throughout New York and disproportionately candidates of color.

I know this because I lived it.

After graduating from my MSW program, I took the ASWB exam and failed by one point. I was devastated. Years later, I tried again—this time failing by two points. The feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and professional stagnation were overwhelming. It wasn't until after I completed my doctorate and was teaching full time at a graduate school of social work in New York City that I felt confident enough to try again.

What changed? I didn't study the content; I studied the test. I had to unlearn what I knew about social work and learn how to take a standardized exam: how to think like the test-makers, how to interpret key words, and how to strategically choose answers. I even remember being advised to "think like a white woman from Utah." That was the exam-taking strategy. I finally passed the exam—eight months pregnant—but only because I was armed not with deeper knowledge of social work, but with the tools to play the testing game.

Supporters of the exam may argue that people simply need to try harder or study more. They may suggest the test is a fair measure of competence. But that ignores the structural inequities baked into the process. The data is clear: pass rates vary significantly by language, race, and age. This is not about effort, it's about access.

The ASWB exam is not an equitable or culturally responsive measure of readiness to practice. It serves as a gatekeeper that disproportionately excludes the very communities, we need in the social work profession—communities of color, multilingual practitioners, and those from marginalized backgrounds.

We urge the New York City Council to support Resolution 362-A.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



June 18th, 2025

RE: Testimony of the New York Apartment Association to the NYC Council Committee on Housing and Buildings on Int. 791 and Int. 1232.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the New York Apartment Association (NYAA), whose members own and operate more than half a million rent-stabilized apartments throughout New York City. NYAA members are long-term owners and operators of multifamily rental housing, most of which was constructed before 1974 and which do not receive any government subsidy in exchange for being subject to rent stabilization. These buildings are maintained without public financing or tax abatements and provide below-market rental housing through private investment and stewardship at no additional cost to the government. Many of our members rent to households with individual subsidies, shelter allowances, and other rental assistance and engage with the Department of Social Services (DSS) often. We thank Chair Ayala and the Committee for giving us the opportunity to testify on behalf of our members.

Testimony in Support of Int. 791

The New York Apartment Association supports Int. 791, which would require DSS to post on its website data concerning vacant supportive housing units, including the total number and percentage of all supportive housing units in the city that are vacant as well as the number of vacant units at different stages in the placement process. This bill is a step in the right direction toward improving transparency, reducing inefficiencies in the placement process, and learning more about the utilization of the city's existing supportive housing resources.

Homeowners and property managers commonly find units in supportive housing empty for extended periods of time, not due to a lack of need, but due to delays in referrals, eligibility determinations, or coordination among agencies. Often housing providers spend months working through the leasing process only to find out that the prospective tenant has leased a different unit, which then requires the housing provider to restart the months-long leasing process with a new prospective tenant. The delays represent a missed opportunity to house vulnerable individuals, but also create financial and operational challenges for property owners committed to providing these units.

By making the number and status of vacant supportive housing openly available online, this bill would allow for greater visibility into the systemic issues resulting in long term vacancies for this vital category of rental housing. It can streamline placement timelines and improve coordination between agencies, housing providers, and other stakeholders.

Any publicly available information must be careful not to violate any individual privacy, which can be accomplished by removing any detailed information about the unit address or the potential tenant. We believe that any privacy concerns can be properly resolved in order to increase access to information that would ultimately support more efficient housing placements, increased accountability, and better outcomes for tenants and providers. While the details of implementation will be important, especially to ensure the data is meaningful and actionable, the overall direction of this legislation aligns with broader goals of maximizing the use of existing housing stock.

Testimony Supporting the Intent of Int. 1232

Int. 1232 would require the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to notify both tenants and property owners or their managing agents when an Emergency Assistance Grant is approved. We appreciate the Council's effort to increase transparency and improve communication around rental assistance awards, and therefore we support this legislation and hope to see future bills that improve communications between housing providers and government agencies regarding rental subsidies and grants.

Too often, property owners are not aware of the status of rental assistance applications, which can cause confusion and unnecessary conflict between housing providers and their tenants. An automated notification associated with each step of the rental assistance grant application process, if implemented effectively, would improve relationships between housing providers and tenants, reduce miscommunications between parties, and improve housing stability for tenants.

To ensure the notice requirement is truly effective, we recommend that the bill also include a provision that requires the housing provider or managing agent's contact information be included on the assistance application. Without this, the usefulness of the notification requirement will be limited. We also encourage the Council to look at ways to allow housing providers to initiate applications and provide information on behalf of their tenants to improve application processing timelines and ensure eligible applicants are not denied based on the failure to provide required documentation.

We thank CM Restler for the introduction of Int. 791 and CM Banks for the introduction of Int. 1293



Submitted Testimony

Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry

For the Committee of General Welfare Budget Hearing on the FY26 NYC Budget

June 18, 2025

My name is Stephen Grimaldi. I'm the Executive Director of New York Common Pantry and a representative of The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access.

Thank you, Committee Chair Ayala and Members of the Committee on General Welfare for this opportunity. We appreciate the thoughtful manner in which the City Council is considering our requests. Today marks the third public hearing since March on this important issue.

As you know, hunger in New York has reached epidemic proportions:

- 1.3 million households – nearly 3 Million people – in New York are struggling to make ends meet.¹
- More than 3 out of 4 NYC households say the cost of food is rising faster than their income²
- And 1 in 3 New Yorkers has used a food pantry in the past three years.³

At New York Common Pantry, we see struggling city residents daily and have stepped up our provision of healthy and fresh food to communities in need. Last year, we:

- Served more than 11 million meals
- Assisted nearly 730,000 guests and
- Expanded our mobile programs to serve 350 community partner sites throughout the city

¹ True Cost of Living Report, April 2023. Produced by Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington School of Social Work, for the Fund for the City of New York and the United Way of New York City

² [New York Hunger Survey](#), Change Research, April 2024, commissioned by No Kid Hungry.

³ "The Annual State of Poverty and Disadvantage," Robin Hood and the Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University, Volume 6, Winter 2024. <https://robinhood.org/news/poverty-tracker-spotlight-food-assistance-pantries-2024/>



Last month we experienced a 16% increase in meals across our programs when compared to the same time last year, and that's on top of the 17% increase in individuals we served last fiscal year.

New Yorkers face a series of hardships that are hard to overcome: rising costs and lack of access to quality food and healthcare, the high price of utilities, childcare and housing. We, and organizations like ours, battle daily to feed the millions of New Yorkers who are facing these hardships.

As you have been hearing today, the emergency food sector has been under siege. While food insecurity persists and the need continues to rise, chronic government underfunding threatens the services we provide to our guests. For too long, we've been asked to do more with our limited resources. That cannot continue.

With the recent Department of Agriculture termination of the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement and the Commodity Credit Corporation's shipments of TEFAP products, and the potential cuts to Farm Bill appropriations that cover safety net programs such as SNAP, WIC and CSFP, Hunger Relief organizations are feeling the funding pressure more than ever. As New Yorkers in need are facing reductions in SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, and other public benefits, the organizations they turn to in these situations are experiencing the same painful funding reductions.

The City Council must fill the funding gap to support the organizations feeding food insecure NYC residents through the CFC program. Additionally, delays in processing CFC applications, like the one NYCP has faced, should be resolved quickly so that funds can be accessed. City contracting for other services and DYCD funds also are subject to backlogs in payment, which further exacerbate the pressures felt by providers. This must be addressed.

We applaud the City Council for calling on the Administration to **increase CFC's baseline budget to \$100 million**. This will help us to continue feeding all of our hungry neighbors. Greater support like this is essential for the city to be able to address the needs of underserved New Yorkers.



Thank

you for your time and consideration.

Good afternoon, my name is Maria Lizardo and I am the Executive Director at NMIC, a settlement house serving 14,000 community members in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx.

I am a proud social worker and a graduate of Hunter College School of Social Work where I

majored in Community Organizing. I am also here today as a member of Social Workers

for Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I am testifying today

in support of Resolution 362-A which is in support of the Social Work Workforce Act. This

legislation would eliminate the entry level ASWB licensing exam as a

condition for licensure because of its long standing and national extreme racial biases in pass rates and that it lacks any evidence that it scientifically measures the competence of

social workers. 49% of Black social work graduates and 62% of Latino graduates in NYS

pass this biased exam. By comparison, 88% of White social graduates pass the exam. This

exam excludes the very social workers we most need from

practicing- those who reflect the populations we serve in high need communities and

public and non-profit agencies. When I graduated in 1997, I had no intention of taking the

exam. After spending two and a half years in school, completing two semesters of an internship, and having worked in the field, I was not going to let the exam be the only

measure of my social work skills. Although years later I was able to obtain my license when

the licensing regulations changed and I was grandfathered in, I still firmly believe that the

foundation of my skillsets are based on the academics and my experience in the field.
A

biased test cannot and should not determine people's employability or be an assessment

of people's skillsets to be able to do the job.

New York State would not be the first state to eliminate the social work licensing exam.

When Illinois passed similar legislation in 2022, they welcomed 10,000 new social workers

in two years. Rhode Island doubled their workforce. We are likely to see an increase of 20,000 social workers when the exam is eliminated and they will deliver the essential mental health services that NYC and NYS needs.

To summarize, I submit this testimony in support of the Resolution submitted by Council Member Bottcher, and the Social Work Workforce Act as sponsored by Senator Brouk and

Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas. Thank you for your time.



Testimony of

Raji Edayathumangalam, MSc, PhD, LCSW

Senior Policy Social Worker

New York County Defender Services

Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

June 18, 2025

New York County Defender Services (NYCDS) testifies in support of Int. 0791-2024 and issues a continued call for structural reform of the supportive housing application process. We thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the Committee on General Welfare for holding this important hearing to address the major sources of dysfunction in our city's housing and benefits process.

NYCDS is a public defender office based in Manhattan that serves more than 10,000 clients in criminal cases every year and over half a million people since we opened our doors over 25 years ago.

I am Senior Policy Social Worker at NYCDS, where I've been working in direct practice and policy roles for almost six years. I'm also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a part-time psychotherapist at a community mental health clinic in Manhattan. Prior to NYCDS, I worked in a health center in East Harlem where I provided mental health assessments, treatment planning, and psychotherapy to children, adults, couples, and families. Prior to becoming a social worker, I held a long and productive career as a life scientist focused on the molecular mechanisms underlying Alzheimer's disease, and on the biochemistry and structural biology of gene expression. I also serve on the New York State Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness.

It is a profound paradox that while thousands experience homelessness or endure protracted stays in temporary shelters, a staggering 4,000 supportive housing units lie vacant, as revealed by

Freedom of Information Law requests.¹ These highly sought-after apartments offer not just stable housing with rent capped at a percentage of income, but also offer vital wraparound services from dedicated nonprofit providers. Yet, the path to accessing these life-changing resources is fraught with extensive barriers that are hard felt by NYCDS clients and many others. The application process for supportive housing is a bureaucratic labyrinth, often taking a dispiriting 12 to 15 months to navigate.

A primary impediment that this legislation seeks to address is the fractured landscape of supportive housing operations. A sprawling array of city and state agencies, alongside numerous nonprofits, currently function without adequate centralized oversight. This fragmentation breeds accountability gaps and significant inefficiencies.

Int. 0791-2024 puts key accountability measures into the existing online system, the Coordinated Assessment & Placement System (CAPS), through which people apply for supportive housing, in an effort to accelerate the placement process. This bill would require that critical data points, such as the total number of available vacant units, be made publicly available on this platform. It would also expose where there have been breakdowns in the process by requiring the posting of elements like the total number of available vacant units for which a placement agency has not referred a client for an interview and the average number of days between the date a vacant unit became available and the date such unit was occupied. This level of transparency is inspired by data-driven models in cities like San Francisco.

We applaud Council Member Lincoln Restler for this bill, recognizing it as a crucial step toward greater transparency in supportive housing. While transparency is valuable, we must also address the deep-seated structural issues that perpetuate barriers to supportive housing, issues our social workers bear witness to daily as clients languish on the streets and in shelters. It is imperative that this body prioritize efforts to shorten the abhorrently long application process. Currently, the onus tragically falls on unhoused individuals to navigate an overwhelming amount of paperwork, adhering to specific NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) requirements, track down housing providers, and complete multiple interviews—a gauntlet that, as mentioned, can take a staggering 12 to 15 months.

This protracted application timeline is unsurprising, given the inherent hurdles. The process frequently demands the coordination of multiple service providers, and crucially, many individuals lack awareness that this support even exists. Furthermore, there are simply not enough teams to meet the overwhelming demand, especially considering the time-consuming and resource-intensive nature of this entire undertaking. The challenges are compounded by the documentation requirements; individuals experiencing homelessness rarely carry the necessary

¹ Gynne Hogan, Most Street-Homeless Housing Applicants Never Get a Shot, Inside Stats Show, The City, (Jan 6, 2025), <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/01/06/homeless-supportive-housing-eric-adams-statistics/>

paperwork, such as identifying documents. Obtaining such IDs often takes months, creating a cyclical nightmare where the lack of one document prevents the acquisition of other essential documentation. We urgently need a fundamental shift: a process that is genuinely user-friendly, with the responsibility for documentation falling on the government, not on the vulnerable individual desperately seeking a home.

Every existing barrier in this system is exponentially exacerbated when there is criminal legal involvement. Policies are exclusionary and identification is particularly difficult to obtain. At NYCDS, in 2024 alone, we served 5,733 clients, a sobering 1,626 of whom were unstably housed. Within this unhoused population, a staggering 27% grappled with mental health concerns and 37% with substance use disorders. Many of these people have graduated from treatment courts. They have worked hard to redress some of the root causes of their criminal legal involvement. They have crisis stabilization, obtained life and job skills, and gainful employment, but are continually obfuscated by a lack of housing.

We need a paradigm shift and a more accessible system overall. This bill must be the first step, amongst some other bills² that have been introduced, in a long set of actions to improve the supportive housing landscape.

If there are any questions about this testimony, please contact me at redayath@nycds.org.

² Int.1191-2025

<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7137375&GUID=9763F146-9F16-4F03-A6A9-8F0FE8E0B59B&Options=ID|Text|&Search=1191>

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group,
in Support of Int 0791-2024, Int 1175-2025, Int 1208-2025,
Int 1232-2025 and Res 0839-2025
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
June 18, 2025

Deputy Speaker Ayala, Council Members, and staff, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee on General Welfare in support of Int 0791-2024, Int 1175-2025, Int 1208-2025, Int 1232-2025 and Res 0839-2025. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I am the Project Director of the Shelter and Economic Stability Project at the New York Legal Assistance Group ("NYLAG").

NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial, and social injustices. We address emerging and urgent needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving clients whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality.

The Shelter and Economic Stability Project at NYLAG provides free legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access public shelter in New York City, and those having trouble accessing or maintaining Public Assistance and SNAP (food stamp) benefits. We work to ensure that every New Yorker has a safe place to sleep by offering legal advice and representation throughout each step of the shelter application process, assist and advocate for clients who are already in shelter as they navigate the

transfer process, and seek adequate facility conditions and resources for their needs. We also represent clients at Administrative Fair Hearings, conduct advocacy with the Department of Social Services ("DSS"), Benefits Access Centers and SNAP centers, and bring impact litigation to ensure that our clients are obtaining and maintaining an adequate level of shelter and benefits.

NYLAG's Domestic Violence Law Unit (DVLU) provides free family, matrimonial, and immigration advice and legal representation to domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual assault survivors in New York, as well as continued victim's advocacy and safety planning. Our attorneys appear frequently in the Matrimonial Parts in the Supreme Courts and Integrated Domestic Violence Courts in New York City, representing clients of all income levels and financial circumstances in contested matrimonial actions. These cases can involve contentious custody and visitation disputes, complex issues of support and equitable distribution, and voluminous and lengthy discovery processes. Most often our clients are the lower-earning spouse, with little to no access to any of the financial information associated with the marriage due to deliberate concealment by the higher-earning and abusive spouse.

Based on our extensive experience working with people experiencing homelessness, public benefits applicants and recipients and survivors of domestic violence, we offer the following testimony.

1. Int 1208-2025

NYLAG enthusiastically supports Int. 1208-2025, which mandates reporting on the availability of air conditioning in homeless shelters. This bill is a critical first step toward ensuring that every public shelter is equipped with life-saving cooling.

It is no surprise to this Council that New York City experiences extreme heat during the summer months, and those temperatures are rising due to climate change. Each summer, more than 500 New Yorkers die as a result of extreme heat.¹ Heat-related deaths account for approximately 3% of all deaths from May through September.² Unsurprisingly, these deaths do not fall evenly across racial lines: Black New Yorkers are more than twice as likely to die from heat stress than white New Yorkers.³

According to the NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, "lack of access to home air conditioning (AC) is the most important risk factor for heat-stress death."⁴ For those who died directly from heat stress, the place of death was most often an un-air-conditioned home.⁵ Heat-exacerbated deaths were also more likely to occur at home.⁶ Clearly, access to cooling is essential for summer safety.

Currently, many New York City shelters lack air conditioning.⁷ NYLAG clients consistently report stifling conditions that make it unbearable to sleep at night. These conditions are often worsened by sealed windows and a lack of fans or other cooling devices. In some cases, clients are forced into street homelessness during the summer because shelter conditions are so oppressive.

¹ 2025 NYC Heat-Related Mortality Report, <https://a816-dohbsp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/data-features/heat-report/>

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Thousands of NYC Shelter Residents Lack Air Conditioning <https://www.planetizen.com/news/2024/07/130336-thousands-nyc-shelter-residents-lack-air-conditioning#:~:text=Residents%20of%20New%20York%20City,Conditioning%20Public%20Health%20View%20More>; Families Say Shelters Without Air-Conditioning Are Like 'Living in Hell' <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/16/nyregion/air-conditioning-homeless-shelters.html>

This bill is an essential first step toward providing New Yorkers experiencing homelessness with safe, livable environments during the summer. NYLAG urges the Council not only to pass this legislation, but also to take the next step: mandate that all shelters provide air conditioning and allocate funding to bring older shelters into compliance.

2. Int 1232-2025

NYLAG also enthusiastically supports Int. 1232-2025, which would require the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to send automated text or email notifications to both applicants and landlords' agents when emergency rental assistance grants are approved. After applying for an HRA benefit, clients often feel as though their applications have disappeared into a black hole. Many NYLAG clients submit applications and never receive any updates. Given HRA's disorganization and the frequent inaction on applications, any measure that increases transparency around approval status is a welcome improvement. This bill will be especially beneficial for NYLAG clients involved in eviction proceedings who are anxiously awaiting emergency grants to prevent displacement. NYLAG strongly supports this legislation.

3. Int 0791-2024

Int. 0791-2024 would require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to publish data on its website regarding the availability of vacant supportive housing units listed in the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS). While NYLAG supports the intent of this bill, we do not believe it will fully achieve its goal. The CAPS system includes

only a portion of New York City’s supportive housing portfolio—not all units.⁸ This effort should be expanded to require the City to report vacancy data for all supportive housing units in its portfolio.

4. Int 1175-2025

The high cost of contested matrimonial cases in New York City places legal representation far out of reach for many individuals with low-income or limited access to assets—particularly survivors of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or sexual assault. NYLAG’s Domestic Violence Law Unit has witnessed the many disadvantages faced by survivors in matrimonial cases, including complex filing procedures, significant upfront and ongoing legal costs, and voluminous discovery demands. Additionally, the absence of counsel not only reinforces existing power imbalances—especially when one spouse can afford a lawyer and the other cannot—but also enables people engaging in abusive behavior against their partners to maintain control and inflict ongoing harm during divorce proceedings.

In light of this, NYLAG commends the City Council in its consideration of granting additional funding to provide legal assistance to domestic violence survivors as they seek to separate and divorce their abusers, but we urge careful consideration and research before moving to practical implementation. Before passing a city-wide bill, we recommend City Council form an investigatory committee to speak to various legal organizations already providing such services, survivors who have been through matrimonial proceedings in New York, as well court personnel and Jurists across all Supreme

⁸ NYC HRA CAS LOCAL LAW 3 REPORTING ON COORDINATED ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT SYSTEM (CAPS) FISCAL YEAR ENDING 6/30/2024, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/news/HRA-Local-Law-3-CFY2024-08272024.pdf>

Courthouses in New York, including but not limited to the Integrated Domestic Violence Court Parts. The committee may be able to identify the number of survivors who may be in need of services, the time and monetary costs for uncontested and contested matrimonial cases, barriers to access, best practices and lessons learned in rolling out right to counsel in New York City, and more in order to understand the capacity and infrastructure needed to support this essential work.

Alongside that, the City Council should approve the proposed one-year pilot project set forth by the Legal Aid Society and NYLAG for New York County, which will assist City Council in obtaining the vital information necessary to fully assess the resources required for the successful and impactful implementation of this bill.

NYLAG believes that true reform requires input from the very communities we are seeking to serve and the systems that the reform seeks to change. With thoughtful execution, this initiative could transform access to justice, helping survivors navigate divorce safely and emerge from the legal system with a meaningful opportunity to assert their rights, be heard, and reclaim their lives.

5. Res 0839-2025

NYLAG strongly supports Res. 0839-2025, which calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A03578/S00403 to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund. NYLAG's Public Assistance and SNAP team receives calls every day from individuals whose SNAP or cash assistance benefits have been stolen. For a limited time, Congress allowed for partial reimbursement of stolen SNAP benefits—but that program has since ended, leaving victims with no way to recover the

assistance they rely on to buy food. While some stolen cash assistance benefits are eligible for replacement, the reimbursement is capped at just two months' worth of benefits.

Additionally, there are clear vulnerabilities in the EBT card technology that have allowed benefit skimming to flourish. To date, we have not seen any plans from DSS to address these technological weaknesses or to strengthen the system against fraud. Our clients depend on these benefits to survive, and a victims compensation fund is essential to support them in the face of ongoing theft and systemic gaps.

We thank the Committee on General Welfare for the work it has done to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers, and for giving us an opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation. We hope we can continue to be a resource for you going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



June 18, 2025

Committee on General Welfare

Hon. Diana Ayala, Chair

**Testimony of Stacy Schecter, Director, Domestic Violence Law Project
Safe Horizon**

Intro. 1175-2025, A bill to require the Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) to establish a program, subject to appropriation, to provide domestic violence survivors with legal representation throughout a divorce proceeding.

Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and Members of the Committee. My name is Stacy Schecter, and I am the director of Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Law Project. Safe Horizon is the nation's largest nonprofit victim assistance organization. Our mission is to stand with those who have experienced violence, abuse, and exploitation. We offer unwavering support, and advocate for systemic change. We envision a world where safety is a universal human right, and we all share a collective responsibility to protect and uphold it. We strive for a society where people are safe in their communities, homes, bodies, and minds.

As New York's largest provider of services for survivors of domestic violence, Safe Horizon and its Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) support efforts to expand access to legal representation in divorce proceedings. We commend the drafters of this legislation for recognizing that survivors of intimate partner violence face profound barriers to safety, stability, and justice...barriers that are often compounded by the lack of legal representation in family law matters.

DVLP provides trauma-informed legal representation to approximately 2,000 survivors of domestic violence in Family and Supreme Courts across New York City each year. Our clients are overwhelmingly people of color, many of whom are immigrant, low-income, or parenting young children. DVLP assists with orders of protection, custody and visitation, child support, and uncontested divorces. Our attorneys advocate not only for legal outcomes, but for long-term safety and independence, often walking with survivors through deeply painful and high-risk transitions.

We are encouraged by the spirit of this proposed legislation and support its goal of ensuring that survivors of domestic violence are not left to navigate the complex and emotionally charged

process of divorce alone. To that end, we respectfully recommend several key components be included as the bill takes shape:

Pilot Program

We endorse the creation of a borough-specific pilot project to assess the feasibility and impact of the proposed divorce representation model. A targeted rollout (ideally in a borough with high rates of reported domestic violence and unmet legal need) will allow for a meaningful evaluation of client outcomes, court efficiency, and provider capacity.

Means Testing

We recommend a means test to ensure that the pilot program prioritizes survivors with the fewest financial resources, who are often least able to access private counsel and most vulnerable to long-term economic abuse. Income guidelines aligned with other civil legal services eligibility standards could help ensure equitable access to services.

Funding for Civil Legal Services Providers

To ensure sustainability and effectiveness, the legislation must include dedicated funding for the nonprofit civil legal services organizations that already serve this population. These providers (including DVLP) have the infrastructure, expertise, and trauma-informed training needed to represent survivors in both contested and uncontested divorce proceedings. Expanding capacity within existing systems is a cost-effective and survivor-centered approach.

We appreciate the thoughtfulness behind this proposed legislation and look forward to further collaboration with the City Council and our civil legal services partners to ensure that it not only expands access to services, but does so in a way that centers survivors' safety, autonomy, and dignity.

New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
Chair, Council Member Ayala

June 18, 2025

Testimony in Support of Resolution 362-A

Thank you to Chair Diana Ayala and the Committee on General Welfare members, Council Member Bottcher, and the Social Work Workforce Act as sponsored by Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, for the opportunity to testify today on Resolution 362-A, urging the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A.701/S.988- the Social Work Workforce Act. I am Shyvonne Noboa, Associate Executive Director for Older Adult Services at Sunnyside Community Services (SCS), social worker, and a member of Social Workers for Justice.

Sunnyside Community Services (SCS) is a community-based not-for-profit centered on the

belief that every person deserves meaningful support to achieve their aspirations – especially struggling families and individuals. We are proud to serve 16,000 people of all ages, mainly in Western Queens, but you will find our participants throughout the borough and beyond. The division of programs I oversee encompasses a continuum of vital programming that helps older adults continue to be active members in their community, live with dignity, and remain safe in their homes. Those services include Family Caregiving, Case Management, Elder Justice, Geriatric Mental Health, and an older adult Center.

As a lifelong advocate for older adults, I am deeply concerned about the unacceptable delays in care our older clients face due to a shortage of licensed master's level social workers and this testimony will highlight the urgent need for change.

We know there are a growing number of master's level social workers in New York who are ready, willing, and able to serve, but are held back by a requirement to take an exam that does not reflect their ability to provide high quality, compassionate care. These social workers, many of whom are bilingual and culturally competent reflecting the vulnerable communities that need their services most, are essential in meeting the growing mental health needs of older adults, but the odds are stacked against them as they are expected to pass an unbiased and unscientific licensing exam.

At SCS, we provide Geriatric Mental Health services under one master's level social worker who provides critical support to older adults facing isolation, depression, anxiety, and the added challenges of living with chronic debilitating health conditions. Leading three support groups that are often overcrowded with upwards of 15-20 participants

When not facilitating these groups, he offers one-on-one counseling. This fiscal year, he has already screened over 220 older adults for mental health services and counting.

Despite his efforts, the need for services outpaces availability. He either maintains a waitlist and or closes intake when he can no longer add to his caseload. He refers out clients for higher levels of clinical care, when necessary, but many clients, especially Spanish speakers or those for whom English is a second language, they often wait weeks to access appointments for mental health care. We should all be outraged.

We need more social workers to manage the growing caseloads and meet the needs of our aging population. The Social Work Workforce Act can help bridge this gap by enabling our agency to hire more licensed staff and connect clients with social workers at community based mental health clinics who are equipped to provide the clinical care older adults need in their communities.

SCS is just one agency grappling with this challenge. Multiplying this issue by the many other community-based nonprofits across NYC and the State, and the siren gets louder and louder.

On a personal note, I lived through the pandemic in my beloved neighborhood of Corona, Queens, one of the hardest hit communities in the country. My family was a multigeneration household, with four generations under one roof, with no possibility of social distancing in a one family home and no vaccines yet developed. My grandfather, Tobias Noboa, spent five agonizing weeks in the hospital fighting COVID-19. He died on May 25, 2020.

In the aftermath of his death, a loved one in my family was paralyzed by grief. I spent months searching for a licensed social worker to provide grief therapy and I could not find one. The waitlists were impossibly long. There simply weren't enough social workers available. In the end, they were placed on intake to see a student psychologist at a school-based mental health clinic, but that experience fell far short of the care needed. As a social worker I could not help my own family member. **It felt like a personal failure, but let's be clear: it was a systemic failure that affects far too many in our community.**

The NYC Council's endorsement of the Social Work Workforce Act would send a clear message that we, as a city, are fully committed to prioritizing the mental health and well-being of all New Yorkers, especially older New Yorkers, and that we recognize and elevate the vital role of social workers in this effort. **This is not just a policy change, it's a call for justice and equity in mental health care.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I can be reached by emailing snoboa@scsny.org.

June 17, 2025

Alan Levine
President

Twyla Carter
*Attorney-in-Chief
Chief Executive Officer*

Adriene L. Holder
*Chief Attorney
Civil Practice*

BILL NUMBER: Int. No. 1175-2025
BILL NUMBER: Int. No. 1208-2025
RESOLUTION NUMBER: Res. No. 0839-2025

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT:

Founded in 1876, The Legal Aid Society is the oldest and largest not-for profit provider of free direct legal services to low-income families and individuals in the United States. Operating from 24 locations in New York City with a staff of over 2,300, over 480,000 individuals and their families benefitted from the Society holistic direct services last year. The Society's law reform and social justice advocacy benefits some two million low-income individuals and families in New York City.

The mission of The Legal Aid Society's Civil Practice is to improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers by providing legal representation and advocacy to vulnerable families and individuals so that they are able to obtain and maintain the basic necessities of life and access the benefits to which they and their families are entitled. The Society's Civil Practice focuses on enhancing individual, family, and community stability by serving our clients in resolving a full range of legal problems in the areas of housing, public benefits, foreclosure prevention, immigration, domestic violence and family law, health law, employment, elder law, tax law, community economic development, health law, and consumer law. The Legal Aid Society's Family Law and Domestic Violence (Family/DV) Practice is one of a small number of DV legal providers who represent survivors in contested divorce proceedings and a leading expert in this legal area. In the most recent complete federal fiscal year (FY23), our Family/DV staff assisted in more than 1,400 individual legal matters impacting nearly 3,800 individuals. LAS is also the only provider of divorces with a physical presence in all five boroughs.

While the bulk of our testimony will center the experience and needs the Family/DV Practice, we also welcome the opportunity to support the Council's advocacy on behalf of shelter residents and to protect against theft of public benefits.

The Need for Counsel in Divorces in Supreme Court

There is a right to counsel in custody, visitation and orders of protection in both Family Court and in Supreme Court in the divorce. But there is no right to counsel for the financial matters in the divorce, child support and maintenance. Nor is there a right to counsel for the actual divorce, including the myriad of paperwork required. Since the financial matters are used as leverage in custody and visitation, it makes it near impossible to assist in representation without doing all parts

Justice in Every Borough.

of the divorce. So, the attorneys who do just the custody and visitation are often at a disadvantage as are the clients who only receive part representation.

Contested divorces can take a long time and require significant resources. In Manhattan the average divorce may take a year and a half. In other boroughs, such as Queens and the Bronx, divorces could take four years.

Economic abuse is a factor in most domestic violence. Economic abuse, the withholding of financial support, the hiding of assets and the inability of a domestic violence survivor to have assets or income in their name, is prevalent in most domestic violence matters. Not only does it create a more complex divorce matter, but it makes litigating cases unrepresented extremely difficult. Litigants do not know how to find assets or hold abusers in contempt for not paying support. These complex parts of a divorce require an attorney.

Supreme court is not user-friendly. Divorces are extremely complicated and very paper intensive. It is near impossible for a litigant to complete a divorce on their own. Even an uncontested divorce is very complicated paper-wise. If someone lacks the ability to read English, it makes the ability to handle a divorce even more difficult. Even if a pro se litigant can initiate/respond to a divorce, filing an RJI and getting through a Preliminary Conference are next to impossible without counsel.

Substantively, the concept of marital property is very foreign to most people but extremely foreign to domestic violence victims who have been financially dependent on their abuser. They assume that if assets are not in their name, they have no right to them. As a result, they waive their rights to pensions, real estate, and other assets. Maintenance guidelines can be helpful in helping litigants make rational decisions -- however, the calculations without legal counsel, are hard for many to understand. When someone is unrepresented, they usually do not know how to ask for maintenance or retirement accounts. This leaves low-income litigants impoverished for the rest of their lives. Since many times only one spouse has a good retirement account or owns a decent living, the other spouse is left out in the cold.

Obtaining possession of marital residence -- even if a rental or public housing apartment -- can only be decided in a divorce. Thus, representation in the divorce is essential to obtaining a place for the victim of domestic violence and the children of the marriage to live. Without a lawyer, victims of domestic violence and their children wind up homeless.

Judges rarely award an adequate amount of counsel fees to the litigant to actually represent a low-income litigant. Most attorneys will not take a case without a retainer and most judges give limited awards of counsel fees which force litigants to go forward without an attorney.

A lack of finances, and an inability to obtain support is listed as one of the main factors that domestic violence survivors both stay in abusive relationships and return to them.

This legislation could be life-changing for domestic violence survivors and could allow more survivors to obtain the support and property they deserve, thus keeping them from being homeless and keeping them off public benefits, which in turn secures their future.

The Legal Aid Society's Application for a Pilot Project

The Legal Aid Society, together with the New York Legal Assistance Group, applied for funding, under Local Law 5 of 2022, for a pilot project to represent low-income domestic violence survivors in divorces. The Right to Counsel for Domestic Violence Survivors Pilot requested funding for FY26. We sought to establish a pilot project in New York County, with a future goal of replicating it in every borough.

The Legal Aid Society (LAS) proposes to implement a pilot program for free brief legal assistance and full legal representation for domestic violence (DV) survivors in divorce proceedings, as envisioned in Local Law 5 of 2022, with our partner, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). LAS and NYLAG participated in the advisory workgroup convened by the Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) of the New York City Human Resources Administration to plan implementation of the pilot and contributed to the report published in 2022. LAS requests \$1.9M as part of a combined project budget with NYLAG of \$300K to implement the pilot.

LAS and NYLAG propose to implement the pilot in one borough (Manhattan) to maximize the efficient provision of legal services given limited available resources. Lessons learned from implementation in Manhattan can then inform expansion of the program citywide. The pilot would represent survivors who earn 200% of the poverty guidelines, or less, with cases in New York County.

The Legal Aid Society submitted this request for funding of the pilot project for the fiscal year 2026.

Legislation should be limited to Low Income Individuals

The Legal Aid Society applauds this bill, but as written, it offers free legal services to all income levels. Free legal services in divorces should be limited, as are other free legal services, to those who fall within an income guideline. We would suggest limiting free legal services to individuals who earn 200% of the poverty guidelines, or less. Also, by considering only the income of the domestic violence survivor, and not including the other party, you only look at the resources available to the survivor to pay for an attorney, and not additional resources that may not be available to the survivor.

For the above reasons, The Legal Aid Society strongly supports the passage of Int. 1175-2025.

Int. No. 1208-2025

Introduction 1208-2025 would require the City to assess the availability of air conditioning across the entire shelter system and issue a report to the Mayor and the Speaker of the Council. This data would be useful for understanding which shelters lack air conditioning, and what investments are needed to ensure that shelter residents are protected from the rising number of extreme heat events each year.

In 2024, DHS issued “Code Red” alerts on 18 separate days, including 14 Level 1 alerts and 4 Level 2 alerts. DHS issues Code Red Level 1 alerts any time the temperature reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher for one day or more or is forecasted to reach 95 degrees Fahrenheit or higher at any point for two consecutive days or more. Code Red Level 2 alerts are issued when forecasted temperatures reach 105 degrees or more Fahrenheit for any duration or are forecasted to reach 95 degrees Fahrenheit for four days or more. When a Code Red alert is issued, DHS conducts additional outreach to unsheltered people to encourage them to visit Drop-in centers or shelters with designated cooling areas.

Yet, for people residing in a shelter without air conditioning, there is no relief. While most shelters have air conditioning in some parts of the shelter, it is insufficient to meet the need. Residents should not need to sleep on cafeteria floors because it is the only part of the shelter that provides air conditioning in warmer months. Often, shelter residents are restricted to particular areas during different times of the day. From 9am to 5pm, congregate shelter residents are not allowed to be in their sleeping quarters unless they have a pass permitting them to rest in bed due to disability or work schedules. But these people may be sleeping in dormitories lacking air conditioning during the hottest part of the day.

According to data collected by the Coalition for the Homeless (“Coalition”) since Fall 2024 as part of their monitoring authority, only 48 percent of inspected shelters for families with children have air conditioning throughout the building. For shelters for adult families and single adults inspected during this period, 64 percent and 76 percent have air conditioning throughout, respectively. The Coalition does not have data for shelters that are not part of monitoring authority, such as domestic violence and youth shelters.

Homeless New Yorkers also have higher rates of disability than the general public, which creates particular hazards for people who face additional health risks in excessive heat; for example, people who take medication that increases sensitivity to heat, causes dehydration, and other side effects exacerbated by warm temperatures. LAS and the Coalition often work with shelter residents to make “reasonable accommodation” requests for air conditioning, but those requests can take

weeks or months to fill, during which time a person's health is at risk. And despite DHS guidance to ensure people who experience disability-related heat sensitivity are provided air conditioning, Coalition staff frequently encounter clients who have not been provided these accommodations, disproportionately people with psychiatric disabilities.

The Legal Aid Society supports Int. No. 1208-2025, but urges that the report also require reporting on the number of reasonable accommodation requests related to air conditioning received by each agency, the number of those requests that were filled, and the length of time between the request and the fulfillment. The report required by the legislation should also be published and made available to the public.

Res. No. 839

The Legal Aid Society strongly supports Resolution Number 839 calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A03578/S00403 to establish a SNAP and CA fraud victims' compensation fund. We commend Council Member Aviles for bringing this important matter before the City Council.

According to the preliminary Mayor's Management Report (MMR), 1.8 million New Yorkers rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to feed themselves and their families. Over 580,000 New Yorkers rely on Cash Assistance (CA). Both SNAP and CA benefits are issued on electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards that utilize outdated magnetic strip technology rendering them highly susceptible to a form of online theft known as skimming. New York State has failed to make the necessary investment to upgrade EBT technology to meet the industry standard technology to protect low-income New Yorkers from digital theft. Further, while state law provides for limited compensation for skimmed CA benefits, New York State has thus far failed to compensate victims whose SNAP benefits were stolen from their account.

Between August 2023 and January 2025, there were 137,315 claims of SNAP skimming reported to HRA. Of this, 95,451 claims were approved and \$43,404,064 in compensation was approved. The numbers are sobering and surely underestimate the scale of loss across the city. Since December 21, 2023, due to a lapse in the federal law that previously authorized compensation, victims of SNAP skimming no longer have any recourse in federal or state law.

New York lawmakers must step in where the federal government has failed. The Legal Aid Society joins with CM Aviles and all cosponsors in calling for the New York State legislature to create a compensation fund to replace stolen SNAP and CA benefits. Additionally, New York State must implement common sense improvements to the technology of EBT cards to protect against theft. The state must act to ensure that digital thieves can no longer cause low-income New Yorkers to go hungry.

Conclusion

The Legal Aid Society thanks the Council and the General Welfare Committee for its leadership on behalf of low-income New Yorkers. We support all the legislation heard at this committee hearing and we thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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NADD TASKFORCE ON LICENSING REFORM
STATEMENT TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

JUNE 18, 2025

To esteemed members of New York City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of social work licensing reform.

The National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD), established in 1986, supports over 200 leaders in social work education across the U.S. and Canada, promoting professional development and excellence. As such we are deeply concerned for the welfare of the profession and the students who obtain their degrees at our accredited programs. In 2019, NADD initiated the Task Force on Licensing Reform after increasing numbers of schools and states were alarmed at the pass rates on the ASWB exam that was required as part of the licensing process for social workers in states across the country. In the absence of data from ASWB on the structure of the exam, information about possible disparities in test scores, and ways in which schools could better prepare students, it was the deans and directors of social work programs in the State of New York who led the charge to produce data that could answer these questions. Data followed from the State of Michigan and finally in 2022, by ASWB.

Years later, the problems inherent in an exam that would not meet academic rigor in validity testing nor is aligned with competencies associated with accreditation, persist and exacerbate, leading to workforce shortages across the country. A staggering 85 percent of counties in the United States face a crucial shortage of behavioral health services, leaving many employers struggling with staffing and communities in need, underserved.⁴ A national survey shows that 85.6% of these employers feel severely or somewhat understaffed in providing essential mental health and bilingual services, primarily due to general shortages (84.2%).⁵

Although 80% of master's social work graduates aspire to become licensed clinical social workers within eight years, a mere 2% achieve clinical licensure within the first three years after graduation. This regrettably low number underscores the need for immediate change in our approach to licensure.⁶ To tackle this urgent issue, many advocate for streamlining the licensure process, either by reducing time requirements or lowering specific prerequisites, to create a stronger pipeline of qualified professionals ready to help.⁵

We support the maintenance of licensure standards for social work practitioners. Yet, standards for licensure vary across states. While some states simply require graduation with a master's degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited program, in many other states, masters' level social work graduates must additionally pass an entry-level exam to enter the workforce. However, this exam is unnecessary, ineffective in assessing practical competencies, and is causing significant strain on the national workforce. **We, along with all major social work professional associations, assert that the first-level exam for graduates of CSWE-accredited programs should be eliminated.** Graduates are required to practice under supervision for up to two years before earning their degree and must demonstrate proof of competency before graduation. **Graduates of CSWE-accredited programs would continue to be recognized as entry-level social workers and would adhere to their state's supervision requirements for licensure.**

Sheryl Kubiak, Co-Chair of the NADD Task Force on Licensing Reform



**Testimony Submitted by
Alyson Rosenthal, Chief Program Officer
West Side Campaign Against Hunger
General Welfare Committee, June 18th, 2025**

Thank you to General Welfare Committee Chair Diana Ayala for holding today's hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Alyson Rosenthal, Chief Program Officer and Registered Dietitian at the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH), an anti-hunger organization that, for 46 years, has been focused on providing access to healthy, fresh produce and direct benefits enrollment to New Yorkers in need. Last year alone WSCAH provided over 5 million pounds of food to 110,000 NYC customers, which included the distribution of over 3 million pounds of fresh produce - over 50% of all food we give out. Decades ago, WSCAH created the customer choice pantry model in the basement of a church on 86th St and Broadway that has been the gold standard for pantry service nationwide. We have since expanded ideas of choice to focus on what our customers demand and deserve...choice of not just apples or bananas but of location of service, delivery models, and time spent securing food.

The West Side Campaign Against Hunger's mission is to make sure all New Yorkers have access with dignity to a choice of **healthy** food and supportive services. Health is prominent in our mission, because our goal is not to just improve food security but to improve the **nutrition security** of all New Yorkers. The quality and nutritional value of the food we provide is core to our mission.

Hunger continues to grow in our city, our state and our country. This year the USDA ERS report released that 1 in 8 New York households are experiencing food insecurity. That is an increase from 1 in 10 in the year prior. In conjunction with the dramatic 25% rise of food inflation from 2019, the pressure on direct providers to meet these needs is immense. Not only is it more expensive for families to shop at the grocery store, but it's also more expensive to keep pantry shelves stocked with healthy, nutritious food.

263 West 86th St • New York, NY 10024 • 212-362-3662 • info@wscah.org

 /wscah  @wscah  @wscah_

DIGNITY. COMMUNITY. CHOICE.

Our WSCAH team of 30 staff and over 2,000 volunteers are working day in and day out, no matter how cold it is outside, serving families all across this great city that join our growing lines. This past year alone we served over 110,000 New Yorkers in need at over 30 community distribution points and via over 2,000 home-based deliveries each month. No matter what the need, we stay focused on our community, making sure they have access to healthy, culturally relevant foods.

The need is growing, and we need more direct support to improve the nutrition security of our communities. Food Insecurity is widely recognized as a social determinant of health and has an important impact on health outcomes and healthcare costs. In fact, WSCAH is coauthor on four peer reviewed journal articles, and findings show that children enrolled in our food is medicine program with New York Presbyterian Hospital and Columbia University Medical Center, have improved food security, eating habits and improved childhood BMI.

This year, with the current federal policy environment, more families will become food and nutrition insecure. Health inequities will increase, with communities that already bear a disproportionate burden of chronic disease, being forced to skip meals or consume lower cost, nutritionally poor foods, further increasing the incidence of diet related diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

The Community Food Connections Program (CFC) has been a significant source of food funding for WSCAH, and has allowed us to obtain culturally relevant, healthy, and fresh food that our customers want and need. **However, in FY2024 WSCAH served 28% percent more people (110,000) than the year before and our CFC dollars shockingly went down 17% over that same time period and went down 28% over the last 2 years.**

In Fiscal Year 2024 the budget for Community Food Connection program, which was \$60.1 million, was slated to drop to \$25 million in FY 2025. Food Pantries work as part of a web of services and support, and when one area is cut, all the community feels the pain. Across the city a massive advocacy push in May/June of 2024 pulled the total CFC funding back up to 2024 levels. We spent an inordinate amount of time and energy across the sector to fight the shocking proposed cuts. The FY26 baseline is only slated to be 20.9 million this coming year. Let's not do this again, we simply have too many hungry friends and neighbors to help feed. The baseline levels are not consistent with the need in our city. We respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following budget recommendations in the FY26 New York City Budget:

Ensure All New York City Families Have Access to Healthy, Affordable Food

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DIGNITY. COMMUNITY. CHOICE.

Increase baseline funding to a total of \$100 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC), formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). A much-needed increase to \$100 million dollars for FY2026 baseline funding for the CFC would help to ensure emergency food providers could purchase fresh, high-quality food to serve more hungry New Yorkers. With federal budgets shrinking, food prices rising and more New Yorkers in need, we need the leadership and support of the City to ensure that our communities are nutritionally secure.

We appreciate your leadership and are grateful for your support.

Submitted by: Alyson Rosenthal, Chief Program Officer of The West Side Campaign Against Hunger, 263 West 86th street NY, NY 10024 arosenthal@wscah.org

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 /wscah  @wscah  @wscah_

DIGNITY. COMMUNITY. CHOICE.

My name is Ace Morreale and I am a social worker and the upstate peer coordinator for Social Workers for Justice from Utica, NY who would like to urge the New York City Council to support the Social Work Work Force Act.

Utica is a city of 60,000 people in central New York. As the tenth largest city in the state, Utica boasts a diverse population that, as a result, has led to a large workforce of social services for the city and surrounding areas. The midway point between Syracuse and Albany, these services cover both the urban and rural populations and often for several counties. Despite this, almost every agency has consistent vacancies for social workers and adjacent positions. While trying to find placement for my internships in the past few years, I would call many agencies to find that they could not take me due to these vacancies or even not having any MSWs on staff. It is true that some agencies are filling social work positions with candidates from other fields which sometimes lead to no MSWs on their staff.

While there are many factors involved in this issue, the factor that brings me here today is the barrier that the licensure exam creates for qualified MSWs to fill those needed positions. I, myself, have not yet taken the exam due to the cost despite having graduated with a 3.95 GPA. And I personally know others who have not yet taken it for the same reason or have tried and could not pass despite them excelling in graduate school. Some who have been dedicated and beloved social workers for years are unable to pass the exam despite excelling in their real-world positions. The reality for Utica and New York State is that the exam is a costly and unnecessary barrier to filling social work positions with qualified MSWs.

My testimony describes to you one city in Upstate New York who would benefit from the passing of the Social Work Work Force Act. While we may be hundreds of miles away from you, having the New York City Council back this bill would help support social workers, their agencies, and their clients who so desperately need it. Having the juggernaut that is New York City side with social workers will help not just your social workers but those throughout the entire state. This exam affects our workforce regardless of location and I urge you to use your power to back all New York social workers with supporting the Social Work Work Force Act.

Written Testimony in Support of the Social Work Workforce Act

Dear New York City Council Committee on General Welfare:

My name is Alexandria Lewis, and I am a licensed clinical social worker and social work educator in Missouri with 22 years of experience. I am testifying to express my concerns regarding the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) social work licensing exams. There is no evidence that the ASWB exam measures professional social work knowledge, skills, or competencies. The Council on Social Work Education, which accredits social work programs, has stated that the exams are redundant and inequitable because of disparities in pass rates.

I felt compelled to testify because I have witnessed firsthand how the ASWB exams create barriers for skilled social workers. I train social work students preparing for the ASWB exams and provide tips for experienced social workers who have failed the exam. I know a social worker with over 20 years of experience who failed the ASWB Master's exam four times. As someone who has researched and written about these issues, I believe the profession deserves a licensing process that reduces barriers to licensure. Requiring the ASWB exam does not protect the public; however, this requirement does prevent skilled professionals from serving the very communities that need them most.

In 2023, the ASWB reported net assets of approximately \$41 million, with exam fees making up 74 percent of its revenue (ProPublica; ASWB, 2021). The ASWB has a financial incentive to lobby against states reducing barriers to social work licensure.

Another important observation is that the exams are a 'game of chance' because they do not all assess the same content. For example, some exams include questions about psychotropic medications, while others do not. Similarly, some exams include questions about working with older adults, whereas others may include questions about working with children and families. Since social work is a broad profession, this is another reason the ASWB exams are problematic. Regarding redundancy, all items that the ASWB indicates could be on the exam are already covered in accredited schools of social work curriculum.

Last, the ASWB's data shows significantly higher failure rates for Black, Indigenous, multilingual, and older social workers. After years of denying that it collected demographic data, the ASWB released a 2022 pass rate report that included demographic data, only after public pressure. The ASWB then deflected blame for pass rate disparities, citing 'upstream factors' as the problem and not recognizing problems with the exams. What is clear is that the ASWB exams measure standardized exam test-taking skills, rather than professional social work skills, knowledge, and competencies.

I respectfully urge the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare to support the Social Work Workforce Act in removing barriers to entering the social work profession and addressing the urgent workforce shortage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alexandria Lewis".

Alexandria Lewis, LCSW

June 18, 2025

Good afternoon, my name is Alison O Jordan. I am here to share my reasons for supporting Resolution 362-A and the Social Work Workforce Act. I am a licensed social worker, beginning my career as Program Director in NYC's largest senior center, and graduating from CUNY's Hunter College School of Social Work.

I retired from NYC government after 39 years at HRA and the Health Department. I now support implementation of proven models and volunteer with national organizations to advocate for policies that support continuity of care and services after incarceration.

Throughout my career, I encouraged many to enter the field of social work and mentored dozens of primarily Black and brown social work students and early career professionals, signing off on thousands of completed internship hours. Then, one day, I would need to have "The Talk" – and advise my mentees that in order to pass the LMSW exam, you need to "think like an older white woman – afraid of Black and brown men – and take the exam through that lens." Those who find a way to pass, often after many tries, must ignore best practices and social work values, take expensive prep courses, and carry extreme financial burdens. White women pass the exam. People of color do not.

We know that the exam is unnecessary and indeed detrimental to the profession. Initially, it was waived for those with experience and supervisors' attestations. Today the exam is a disservice – creating barriers to accessing social work services for those with the greatest need – and needs to be eliminated. People incarcerated are overwhelmingly Black and brown. Those from the poorest areas are Black and brown. Social workers with lived experience, reflective of the people in need of social workers most, matters. It matters to the profession. It matters to us all.

Thank you for your time. I submit this testimony in support of the Resolution submitted by Council Member Bottcher, and the Social Work Workforce Act as sponsored by Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas.

June 18, 2025

Good afternoon, my name is Alison O Jordan. I am here to share my reasons for supporting Resolution 362-A and the Social Work Workforce Act. I am a licensed social worker, beginning my career as Program Director in NYC's largest senior center, and graduating from CUNY's Hunter College School of Social Work.

I retired from NYC government after 39 years at HRA and the Health Department. I now support implementation of proven models and volunteer with national organizations to advocate for policies that support continuity of care and services after incarceration.

Throughout my career, I encouraged many to enter the field of social work and mentored dozens of primarily Black and brown social work students and early career professionals, signing off on thousands of completed internship hours. Then, one day, I would need to have "The Talk" – and advise my mentees that in order to pass the LMSW exam, you need to "think like an older white woman – afraid of Black and brown men – and take the exam through that lens." Those who find a way to pass, often after many tries, must ignore best practices and social work values, take expensive prep courses, and carry extreme financial burdens. White women pass the exam. People of color do not.

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Thank you for your time. I submit this testimony in support of the Resolution submitted by Council Member Bottcher, and the Social Work Workforce Act as sponsored by Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas.

My name is Angelina Ojeda. I am an Addiction Counselor, a social work student, a proud Latina mother, and a lifelong New Yorker from Hollis, Queens. I stand before you today not just to represent myself, but to speak out for the many social workers of color—especially those from BIPOC and other marginalized communities—who are being denied entry into this profession because of a licensing exam that was never built with us in mind.

The ASWB exam is a structural barrier, not a valid measure of competency. I say this as someone who has spent years working directly with underserved populations—people dealing with substance use, trauma, poverty, housing instability, and systemic violence. These are the people I serve every day. And yet, the licensing process asks me to prove my knowledge through a standardized test that is disconnected from the cultural, racial, and economic realities that shape our clients' lives.

The vast majority of ASWB exam questions are written through a white, middle-class, Western lens. They do not reflect the nuanced ways culture, race, and socioeconomics impact decision-making, client behavior, or practitioner response. Let me give you an example from a practice exam:

The “correct” answer, according to the test, is to terminate services due to noncompliance.

But if you're a social worker who understands structural racism, poverty, or immigration-related fear, your response might be entirely different. You might ask:

- Does the client have reliable access to a phone or transportation?
- Are they experiencing homelessness or domestic violence?
- Are there cultural or linguistic barriers?
- Is there trauma, fear of systems, or criminal legal involvement that's causing them to avoid contact?

Choosing to terminate services without exploring these factors is not only culturally incompetent—it's potentially harmful and unethical. But on the exam, that kind of critical, culturally attuned thinking is marked wrong.

This example is just one of many. The exam fails to account for the reality that people of color live in systems that criminalize poverty, pathologize cultural expression, and ignore intergenerational trauma. Social workers from those same communities are often uniquely equipped to navigate these complexities, but instead of being valued, we are being filtered out.

New York City is facing a severe shortage of social workers. Our communities are in crisis—especially Black, Brown, and immigrant communities. The people who are best suited to serve these populations are often the very ones being shut out of licensure due to a test that reinforces inequality.

I'm not asking for lowered standards—I'm asking for equitable ones. Standards that reflect cultural humility, lived experience, and the real-world skills that BIPOC social workers bring to the table every day. It's time to eliminate the ASWB exam requirement and replace it with a more inclusive, practice-based licensure model.

Let us show up for our communities in the ways they need and deserve. Let us remove the barriers that keep us from becoming licensed not because we're unqualified—but because we're under-resourced and over-surveilled.

Social work was built on values of dignity, worth, and justice. Let's make sure our licensing reflects those values too.

Thank you.

Hello, my name is Calvin Michael. I'm speaking on behalf of Safety Net in conjunction with the Urban Justice Center . The main focus of the topic of my testimony this afternoon is because a distribution of NY City Shelters that do not have Air Conditioning. 4 in 10 NYC Shelters have no AC in sleeping areas. According to the New York City paper, The Gothamist, there seems to be quite a large number of clients who are without proper climate control for their living areas.

I spent my entire tenure at Clark Thomas Men's Shelter on Randall's Wards Island without air conditioning. May I also mention that Clark Thomas was a facility that housed 300 homeless clients on an open floor. What was provided in lieu of air conditioning were several industrial fans that were installed on the walls. Air conditioning in homeless shelters isn't just about comfort; it's about preventing heat-related illness, protecting basic human dignity, and ensuring folks have what they need to stay cool and healthy.

I would also like to comment on the related health risks that are associated with not having sufficient air conditioning in close to half of the New York City shelters and the hazard that it creates. Some people are at a higher risk of getting sick from the heat than others. There are unnecessary risks for people who, for example, take medications that make it hard for them to properly regulate their body temperature.

Hot days can be dangerous for anyone, but they can be especially dangerous for those with chronic medical conditions, uncomfortable situations for people who have disabilities and diseases like multiple sclerosis and asthma some of the symptoms of heat related illnesses are muscle, cramps, headaches, nausea, and vomiting.

I can relate and empathize with the personal experiences of my former Shelter mates being in an environment where it's 110°, who are hot and sweaty and angry. Fights erupted in the shelter about every 20 minutes in July or August and it didn't matter. Some of the current residents can experience temperatures in the summer that can be quite unbearable. Temperatures are about to ramp up here in New York City in June. Many people, include those in the shelter I stayed in, will experience them without any air conditioners.

Safety Net are strongly opposed to the lack of air conditioning in existing shelters and propose that the department of homeless services, appropriately address, the lack of air conditioning across 50% of New York shelter population.

While we are glad the issue is being discussed, we also need more than a report. We call on the Council to pass legislation to create a solution to the problem by requiring DHS to install air conditioners in New York City Shelters

I will leave you with this: People die every year because of the heat, and people in shelter have rates of disability much higher than the general public, making them even more vulnerable to the heat. We ask that the Department of Homeless Services use whatever financial resources are available to provide air conditioning for existing clients in our New York City shelters and that the City Council require them to do so.

Damita Owens

Brooklyn NY 11221

6/18/2025

New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for Legislation to Eliminate the Social Work Licensing Exam Requirement

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed legislation that would eliminate the licensing examination requirement for social worker in New York City.

The current exam has long been criticized for perpetuating systematic barriers, disproportionately affecting black, indigenous, and other people of color, as well as immigrants and those for whom English is not a first language. Numerous studies and data sets have demonstrated racial and cultural bias in the content and structure of these exams, resulting in unfair barriers to licensure that do not reflect a candidate's competency or readiness to serve their communities.

Social Work is grounded in values of equity, justice, and compassion. The reliance on a standardized exam as a gatekeeper to professional practice is not only inconsistent with these values, but also exacerbates the workforce crisis in behavioral health, housing, and child welfare-fields already facing dire shortages.

By removing the exam requirement and shifting toward more holistic, competency-based and (GRANDPARENTING) INTO pathways to licensure. The same way as it was required **September 1, 2004 in New York State there is a "grandparenting" clause that allowed individuals with MSW degree and five years of post-MSW experience to apply for the Licensed Master Social Worker LMSW license without taking the licensing exam . "According to NYSUT and the Office of the Professions. This provision allowed those with sufficient experience to bypass the exam requirement when the licensing law was initially implemented.** The city can build a more inclusive, equitable, and effective workforce. This reform would not compromise professional standards- it would reinforce them by emphasizing real-world skills, cultural competence, and community-based knowledge.

I urge the City Council to take bold action to remove this outdated and inequitable barrier. This change would send a powerful message that New York City is committed to justice, equity, and ensuring that those who are qualified and committed to serving their communities are not held back by structurally biased systems.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to addressing inequities in our professional and in our city.

Sincerely,
Damita Owens MSW

Damita Owens, MSW

Special Consultant II Co-Response Coordinator

Crisis Intervention Team

Bureau of Health Promotion for Justice-Impacted Populations

NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene

dowens@health.nyc.gov



Good afternoon, my name is Debbie Hamell-Palmer. I am member of Social Workers for Justice.

I am a Behavioral Health Therapist working in an integrated behavioral health setting. I provide short term counseling to individuals through primary care. I work with a wide variety of patients, including those who are uninsured or underinsured. I am also here today as a member of Social Workers for Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's Workforce Hearing.

I am testifying today in support of Resolution 362-A which is in support of the Social Work

Workforce Act. This legislation would eliminate the entry level ASWB licensing exam as a

condition for licensure because of its long standing and national extreme racial biases in pass

rates and that it lacks any evidence that it scientifically measures the competence of social

workers. This exam excludes the very social workers we most need from practicing- those who

reflect the populations we serve in high need communities and public and non profit agencies.

These social workers are desperately needed to work in schools, shelters, mental health teams,

child welfare agencies, with the homeless, older adults, immigrants and justice impacted families. Social workers offer 75% of all mental health services and if we want to address the

City's mental health crisis we urgently need them and we need them now.

Social workers like me feel the impact of this exam. Here's why: As an African American social worker with over two decades of experience, I have seen firsthand the critical need for increased diversity in our field. Communities thrive when they are supported by professionals who understand their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. For too often, licensing exams create barriers that disproportionately impact people of color, preventing them from entering or advancing in the profession.

We must advocate for systemic change. This includes re-evaluating the structure and fairness of licensure exams, increasing access to affordable preparation resources, and

supporting alternative pathways to licensure. Our communities deserve a workforce that reflects their diversity-both racially and culturally.

It's time to break down these barriers and build a pipeline that uplifts aspiring social workers of color.

My story/these stories are not unique: 49% of Black social work graduates and 62% of Latino

graduates in New York State do not pass this biased exam. They are closed out of the very

jobs that they are educated to hold, and oftentimes, these are jobs they have already worked in

before they entered school, or during the intensive internships completed as part of their masters programs. When Illinois passed similar legislation in 2022, they welcomed 10,000 new

social workers in two years. Rhode Island doubled their workforce. We are likely to see an

increase of 20,000 social workers when the exam is eliminated. They will deliver the essential

mental health services that New York City, and New York State needs.

To summarize, I submit this testimony in support of the Resolution submitted by Council Member Bottcher, and the Social Work Workforce Act as sponsored by Senator Brouk and

Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas. Thank you for your time.

Testimony of Diana Ramos about a Recovery Fund for people who have had their benefits skimmed.

Good Afternoon. My name is Diana Ramos. I am a member of the Safety Net Activists, a part of the Safety Net Project. I am here to give testimony about the need for a recovery fund for benefit recipients who have had their benefits skimmed.

This month I was a victim of my SNAP benefits being skimmed straight off my card. June 4th I received my SNAP by 2:46 am that morning while I was asleep they were stolen off my card. I am very mindful and careful with where I use my benefits. I never give others my pin number, I only use my card at businesses I trust or big corporate stores, I have changed my pin every three months and I even downloaded the recommended app that would allow me to lock my card and keep track of all transactions. That still didn't prevent my SNAP benefits from being skimmed in three separate transactions from Buffalo, Eastchester and Staten Island. I didn't find out till 4p in the afternoon. I immediately took action and I reported my card stolen and received a replacement. I notified my advocate at Safety Net Adrianna Mendoza and the three organizers I frequently work with on various campaigns. I suffered a severe panic attack because I didn't know at that moment what I was going to do for food for the month.

I am a diabetic and I have a certain eating plan I follow to keep me in good health. I also suffer from heat sensitivity which makes standing in line at food banks dangerous. I get SSI and after paying my bills I have very little left over to cover a month of food.

I got very lucky this month and because of the situation was able to get a food grant from Safety Net to get my groceries. HRA would have done nothing.

Thousands of New Yorkers have been robbed with no way of recovering what was stolen from them. New Yorkers on benefits feel abandoned by the state. Many children, elderly and disabled New Yorkers are starving because there is not a way for them to recover funds or even obtain nutritious food.

There are two solutions that would not only combat this problem but also help New Yorkers recover what was stolen. Solution one is Resolution 0839-2025 which calls on the State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign A03578/S00403 that would establish a compensation fund for victims of Benefits fraud. The second solution is to have chip cards which have been proven to be more secure than the current cards. There are many states switching to chip cards including New Jersey. These two solutions together would not only keep New Yorkers benefits safer but also help those who have had their benefits stolen.

I thank you for allowing me to speak .

I'm Jacqueline Mondros and I've been a social worker for 52 years. Former dean at Hunter and dean and professor emeritus at Stony Brook, and now the Interim Director of Social Workers for Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

We are seven days away from the mayoral primary. Every candidate has proposed an expansion of mental health services. And for good reason! Every day New Yorkers experience mental health problems - on our streets, in our subways, in our schools, in our buildings and neighborhoods, and perhaps in our own families. 75% of all services are delivered by social workers and we don't have enough of them and the ones we have do not adequately meet our needs.

The obvious and indefensible obstacle to growing our workforce is the entry level ASWB exam. It has a long standing and national track record of extreme racial bias- an exam which doesn't follow the required Standards to show that it measures competence. ASWB has been asked since 2014 to fix the exam, and the disparities have only worsened. And yet, the outcomes have serious consequences- more than half of Black graduates and more than a third of Latino graduates fail the exam which prohibits them from working as social workers. Others today will testify on the exam's disastrous impact

We applaud all our public officials for proposing funding more mental health services. It is urgently needed and important. But it won't make a bit of difference if there is no one to fill those jobs. If we pass the Social Work Workforce Act we will put thousands of new and culturally diverse social workers to work in our communities. If we delay, we won't. It's as simple as that. We urge City Council to support Resolution 362 and pass the Social Work Workforce Act.

My name is Jaki and I am a resident of Dumbo, Brooklyn.

My husband and I became acquainted with a gentleman, Mr. W, who had been asking for handouts in the neighborhood. We learned that he had become permanently injured when he was working for the Parks Department. Somehow he lost his benefits and was first sleeping at his sister's, then on the street.

We contacted Councilman Lincoln Restler's office. Mr. W and his domestic partner were found shelter. This was the result of months of countless calls among Mr. W, Councilman Restler's office, Breaking Ground (the agency contracted by the city to accommodate unhoused individuals), and us.

How much more productive and respectful it would have been if there were a registry of the 2,000 units of unused housing available to unhoused individuals.

That's why I'm testifying. To advocate for such a registry so that the unhoused and their advocates can find housing for themselves.

Thank you.

Good afternoon, My name is Jennifer zelnick and I'm a professor and social welfare policy chair at the Toro University graduate School of social work in New York City. I've been in this position since 2011 and I'm testifying on behalf of resolution 362, in support of the social work workforce act.

This act is important for social workers, social work students as well as the communities that they serve in New York City. At the Touro University Graduate school of social work, our student body hails from all 5 boroughs of the city, and represent distinct communities including Caribbean-Americans, Jewish- Americans, Spanish-speakers from a range countries, southeast Asians, Chinese immigrants, among many others. In short, our student body is a beautiful reflection of the diversity of New York City.

They also represent diverse experiences. Many of them have experienced homelessness, immigration challenges, the New York City public schools, growing up, food insecure among other issues. These experiences and the diverse identities of our students mean that our students especially important as providers to serve the needs of New York City communities.

The ASWB exam is a barrier to achieving these potentials. It has never been validated that this exam represents skills and knowledge that are needed to be an excellent social worker. The connection between a one-time high stake's multiple choice test, timed and taken in English, is doubtful.

On the other hand, the social work curriculum is developed through expertise and the council on social work education. The accreditation for schools of social work is strenuous. the education we provide is a much better and predictor of the quality of social worker that we graduate from our programs than a one-time high-stakes test is.

As I'm thinking about this resolution and this bill, there are a couple of students that come to mind. One of them worked for a settlement house in Manhattan and came from Puerto Rico and is a native Spanish speaker. She is a lovely person with a deep commitment to children and seeing them excel, particularly children with learning disabilities in the public schools. She already had a position with her employer, however, her position was threatened because of her inability to pass this licensing exam. In my classes, She was a thoughtful, engaged and creative student who brought her own insights to complex questions of social policy and legislation. However, she struggled with reading and processing quickly in English and had failed the exam multiple times. Her employer had extended her opportunities and different job titles in order to keep her on staff, they were running out of options as their contracting required that all their social workers be licensed.

When I think of my student, I think of all the children's lives that she had touched, and potentially would touch. I think of her community and family who were so proud of her achievements as an MSW graduate, and I think of her dedication to working for the people of the city of New York and for her community. I also think of how important it is to this student and all our students to be a licensed social worker. Don't mistake this bill

as an elimination of the social work license, this is about ceasing our reliance on an inadequate measure of professional preparation. Please support this resolution and the social work workforce act. You will be showing your commitment to the people of New York City and the social service and human service agencies that serve them. This is truly a social justice issue, and supporting this resolution will make a difference.

Testimony in Support of Eliminating the LMSW Exam

Submitted by a Graduate Social Work Student and Supporter of Social Workers for Justice

My name is Jocelin N and I am a recent MSW graduate standing firmly with the Social Workers for Justice movement. I speak not only for myself but for countless peers who have sacrificed, persevered, and shown unwavering commitment to this profession, only to be met with a gatekeeping exam that does not reflect our values, our training, or our purpose.

The cost of the LMSW exam is just the beginning of the burden. The study materials alone are exorbitant—hundreds of dollars for access to content that does not test our understanding of community, empathy, or systemic impact, but our ability to memorize, regurgitate, and endure standardized stress. Many of us have already given years to graduate programs and internships—often unpaid—where we did the real work: sitting with grief, navigating crises, showing up in under-resourced systems and advocating in the face of injustice. That is social work. Not a multiple-choice test.

This exam is not a measure of critical thinking. It is not a reflection of cultural competence, or the skill of navigating complex human experiences. Our clients are not four-option questions. They are survivors, families, elders, children—each carrying layered identities, trauma, and resilience. The work requires nuance, not standardized answers.

By upholding this exam as the barrier to licensure, we are shutting out brilliant, dedicated future social workers—especially those from the very communities we claim to serve. This profession needs more people of color. More first-generation students. More immigrants. More voices that understand, firsthand, the impact of housing instability, incarceration, addiction, and generational poverty. Instead, we are losing them—pushed out by a licensing structure rooted in exclusion.

At a time when social services are being gutted, when communities are under attack, and mental health needs are soaring, we need social workers more than ever. But not just any social workers—we need ones who reflect the people we serve. Who speak their languages. Who share their histories. Who show up not out of obligation, but out of lived understanding.

The LMSW exam is not a test of readiness—it's a test of privilege. And we must be brave enough to say so. If we truly care about equity, access, and justice in this field, then we must remove this barrier and reimagine how we define competence and preparation in social work.

Thank you

Greetings Esteemed Members of the New York City Council,

I sincerely thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to the *unnecessary* and *biased* Licensed Master Social Worker, or LMSW, examination.

My name is Dr. Marie Mimose Nelson. **I am a proud, bilingual Haitian social worker.** I hold a Doctorate in Social Work from Capella University, awarded in December 2024, and I have been a Licensed Clinical Social Worker since 2005.

I am here today to tell the truth I have lived. The exams administered by the Association of Social Work Boards, or ASWB, have long been challenging, exclusionary, and deeply biased.

Let me share my journey with you. I graduated from Fordham University with a master's degree in social work in May 1996. While studying at Fordham, I completed countless internship hours, working at mental health agencies, gaining the clinical experience needed to serve the communities I deeply respect. Yet, despite all this preparation, I had to take the former Certified Social Worker exam three times between 1996 and 1997 before I finally passed on my third attempt on April 25, 1997.

That was just the beginning. In 2004, seven years later, the CSW exam was repealed and replaced by the Licensed Master Social Worker exam. I was grandfathered in and granted the LMSW credential. Still, with all my experience, unlike my Caucasian colleagues, I had to wait until 2005 to earn my Licensed Clinical Social Work license, and until 2012 to be granted the "R" privilege—essential for insurance reimbursement.

Here is the heart of the issue: Both the LMSW and LCSW exams are constructed through a predominantly Western lens. They reflect norms, standards, and assumptions that are often misaligned with the lived experiences of immigrants and non-native English speakers. These exams create obstacles, not opportunities. They prevent qualified, competent social workers especially those from diverse, multilingual, and immigrant backgrounds from entering the field, growing within it, and reaching leadership positions.

Our communities need social workers who look like them, who understand them, who speak their languages, and who can build trust and deliver culturally competent care to them. **I am one of them, a proud, competent, bilingual Haitian Creole-speaking social worker.**

I urge this Council to take a stand and advocate against this biased LMSW exam that continues to harm diversity in our profession and blocks access to the very people we need on the front lines. Please remember the social work mission is to serve society **impartially, inclusively, and justly. This exam stands in the way of that mission.**

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your consideration.

Examining the Validity of the ASWB Licensure Exam

BPD Conference | March 14, 2025

Matt DeCarlo, MSW Program Director Saint Joseph's University

Mary Nienow, Director, School of Social Work, New Mexico State
University

Who are we?



What are your most pressing questions about the ASWB exam?

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.

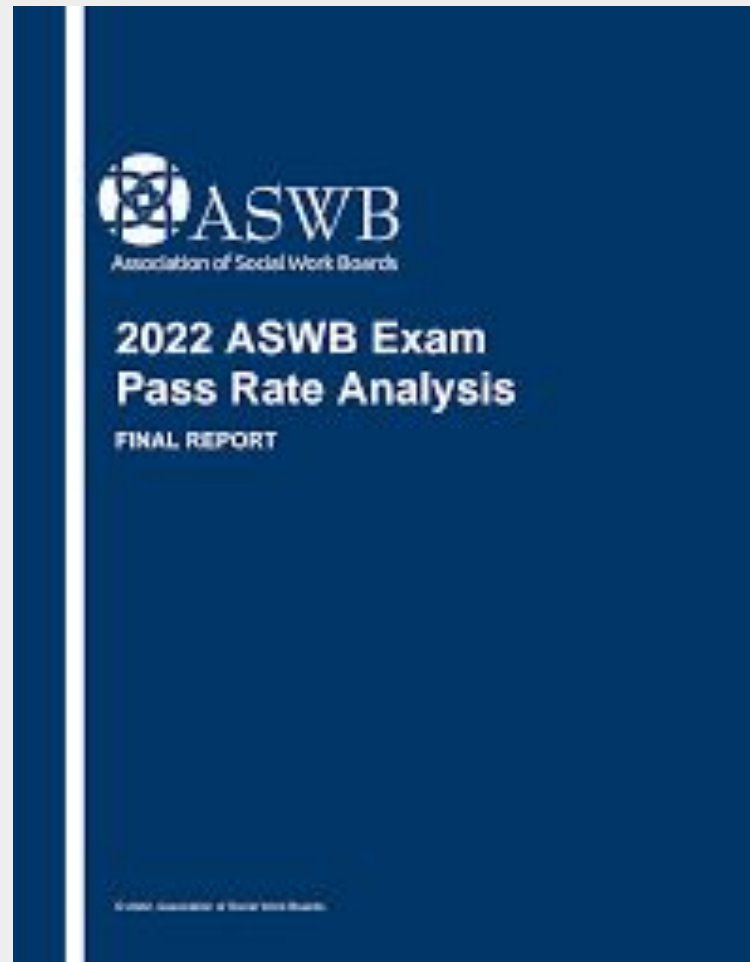


Agenda

- Keep adding to the PollEverywhere!
 - Ask clarifying questions as we present! Q&A later.
- Review of 2022 Exam data release
- Industry standards for standardized exams
- External Factors are NOT to blame
- Invalidity in the ASWB Exam
- Next steps
- Discussion and questions

2022 Exam Data Release

Advocacy works!



Exams pass rates = licensure rates

2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis

FINAL REPORT

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| White MSWs (any age) | 86% passed | 78% licensed |
| Black MSWs (any age) | 45% passed | 48% licensed |
| Latine MSWs (any age) | 64% passed | 60% licensed |
| Older Black MSWs | 30% passed | 31% licensed |
| Older Latine MSWs | 45% passed | 39% licensed |
| Older MSWs (any race) | 65% passed | 50% licensed |

JOURNAL ARTICLE

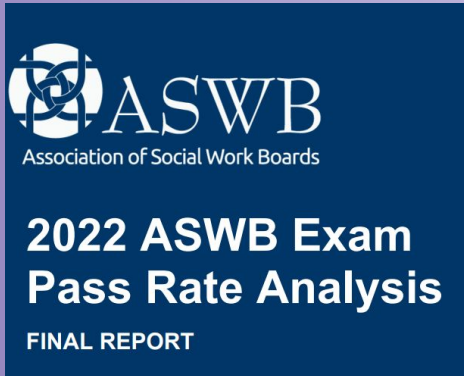
Racial and Age Disparities in Licensing Rates among a Sample of Urban MSW Graduates [Get access >](#)

Evan Senreich ✉, Travis Dale

Social Work, Volume 66, Issue 1, January 2021, Pages 19–28, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.sju.edu/10.1093/sw/swaa045>

Published: 04 January 2021 **Article history** ▼

What does ASWB data show?



2022 average: 72.1% pass on first attempt (82.5% in 2011)

White: 85-88% pass on first attempt, regardless of age

Eventually, **91% pass the LMSW exam**

Black: 45% pass; under 30= 51.3% pass; over 50= 30% pass

Eventually, **52% pass the LMSW exam**

Latine: 64% pass; under 30= 68% pass; over 50= 45% pass

Eventually, **71.2% pass the LMSW exam**

50+ average: 64.8% pass; under 30 average: 77% pass

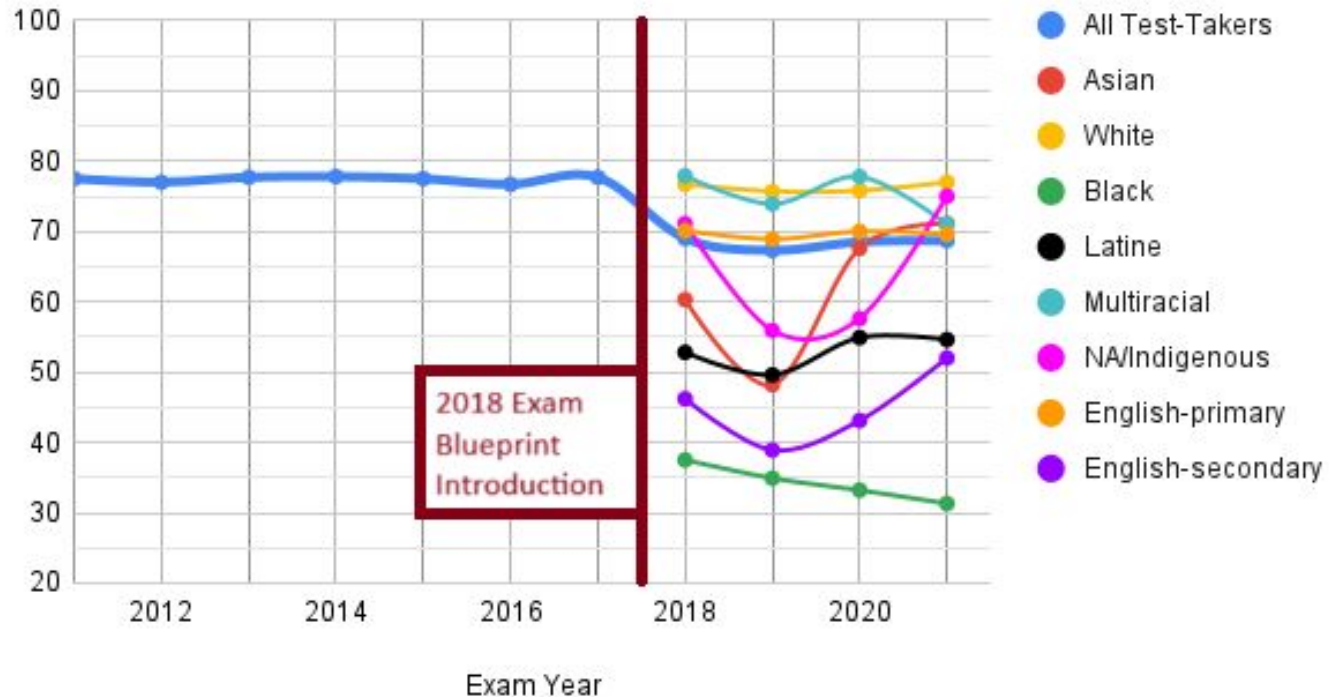
Eventually, 86% of under 30 MSWs pass; **62% of over 50**

English-secondary: 52%, no data on age

Eventually, 80% of English-primary MSWs pass
and **63% of English-secondary MSWs pass**

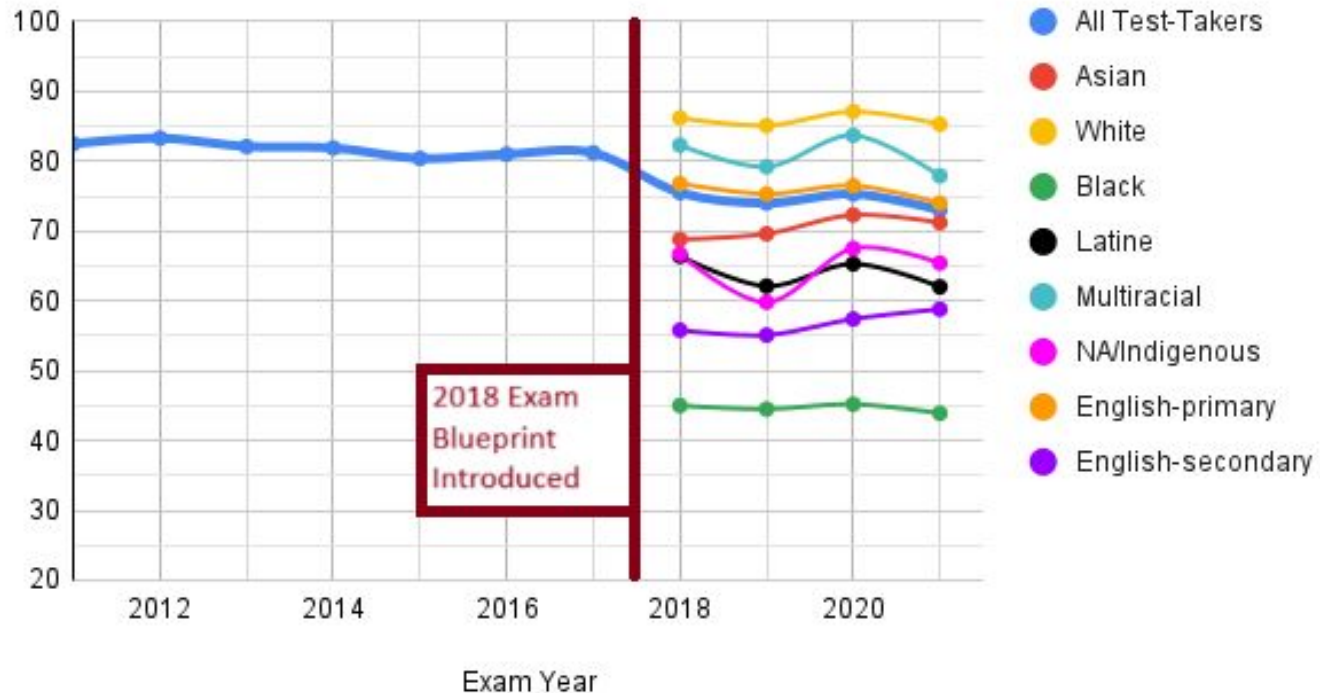
Which groups are below average? (BSW)

Impact of 2018 Blueprint on Bachelors Exam Pass Rates by Demographic



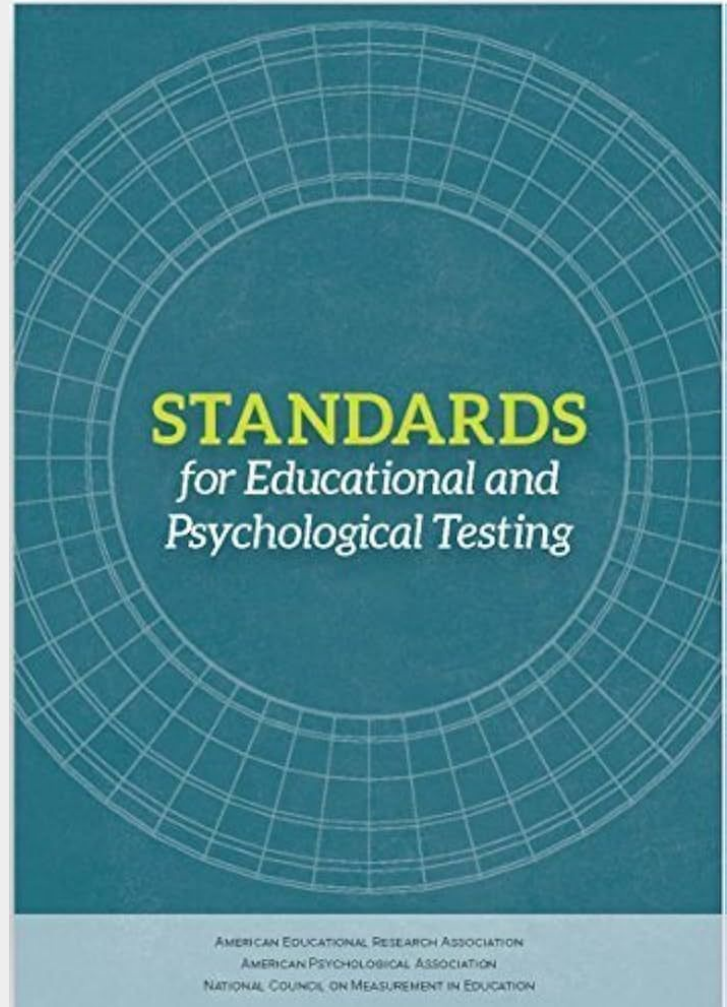
Which groups are below average? (MSW)

Impact of 2018 Blueprint on Masters Exam Pass Rates by Demographic

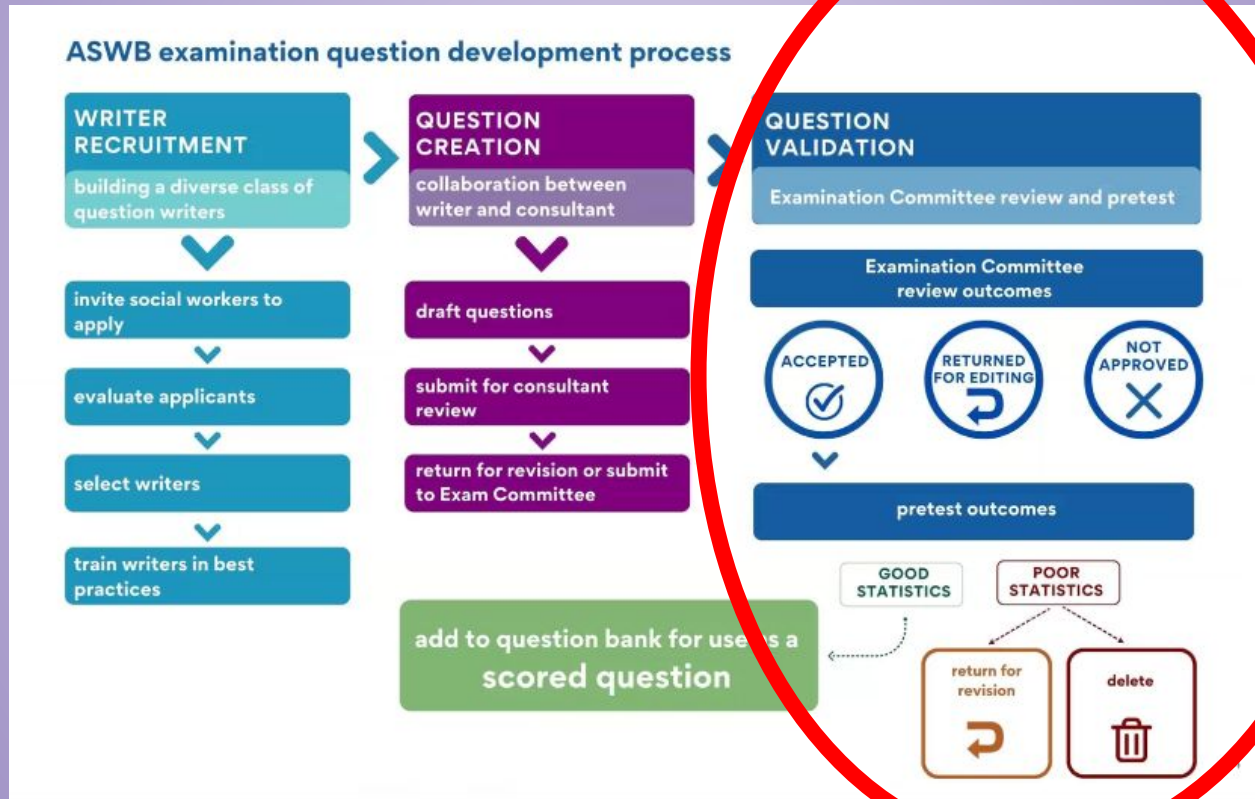


Testing Standards

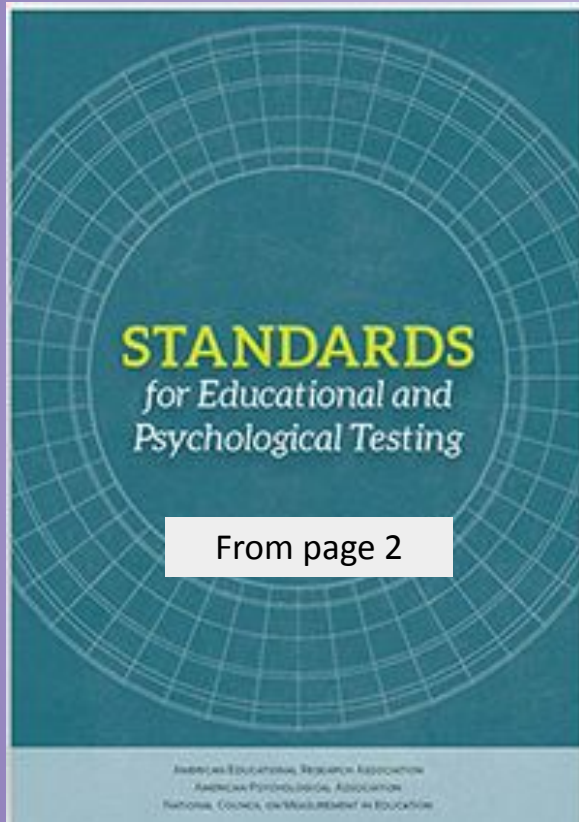
A quick introduction



Where does ASWB go wrong?



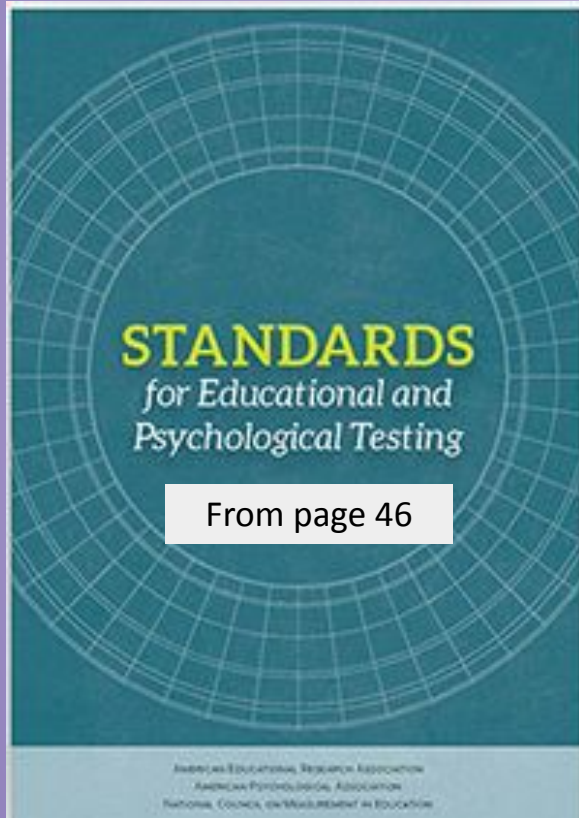
The Standards are legally enforceable, mandatory



“All professional test developers, sponsors, publishers, and users should make reasonable efforts to satisfy and follow the Standards and should encourage others to do so. **All applicable standards should be met by all tests and in all test uses** unless a sound professional reason is available to show why a standard is not relevant or technically feasible in a particular case.” (p. 1)

“Although the Standards is not enforceable by the sponsoring organizations, it has been repeatedly recognized by regulatory authorities and courts as setting forth the **generally accepted professional standards** that developers and users of tests and other selection procedures follow. Compliance or noncompliance with the Standards may be used as **relevant evidence of legal liability in judicial and regulatory proceedings**. The Standards therefore merits careful consideration by all participants in the testing process” (p. 2)

Standards for Cut Scores



From page 46

Standard 2.14

When possible and appropriate, conditional standard errors of measurement should be reported at several score levels unless there is evidence that the standard error is constant across score levels. Where cut scores are specified for selection or classification, the standard errors of measurement should be reported in the vicinity of each cut score.

Comment: Estimation of conditional standard errors is usually feasible with the sample sizes that are used for analyses of reliability/precision. If it is assumed that the standard error *is* constant over a broad range of score levels, the rationale for this assumption should be presented. The model on which the computation of the conditional standard errors is based should be specified.

NCLEX complies, why doesn't ASWB?



Technical Manual for the
RN Comprehensive Predictor® 2019

From page 24

Conditional Standard Errors of Measurement

Standard 2.14 – When possible and appropriate, conditional standard errors of measurement should be reported at several score levels unless there is evidence that the standard error is constant across score levels. Where cut scores are specified for selection or classification, the standard errors of measurement should be reported in the vicinity of each cut score.

Conditional standard error of measurement (CSEM) calculated at various scores allows the test user to gauge the expected stability of scores at the levels of greatest interest. The CSEM at eight Probability of Passing NCLEX-RN levels was calculated using a formula derived by [Woodruff \(1990\)](#) and is displayed in Table 10. Note that as scores deviate from the mid-range score (i.e., 50% Individual Score), the CSEM decreases.

Table 10 CSEM at Various Score Levels

| Probability of Passing (Associated Individual Score) | Interval Sample Size | CSEM |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 99% Probability (80.7%) | 982 | 1.25% |
| 97% Probability (78.0%) | 1,394 | 1.24% |
| 95% Probability (74.7%) | 1,513 | 1.23% |
| 90% Probability (71.3%) | 1,277 | 1.22% |
| 82% Probability (68.0%) | 1,099 | 1.24% |
| 73% Probability (65.3%) | 908 | 1.21% |
| 62% Probability (60.7%) | 631 | 1.24% |
| 53% Probability (58.7%) | 403 | 1.27% |

ASWB defines bias at the *item-level only*



Association of Social Work Boards

May 17, 2023 · 🌐



ASWB does not use DTF
(differential test functioning) to
analyze its exams. Doing so would
be redundant, since ASWB already
uses the more rigorous DIF analysis.



<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=7278593852167485&set=pcb.7278594275500776>



Exam ▾



Licenses ▾



Regulation ▾



Board training and support ▾



Meetings and events ▾



DIF vs. DTF

ASWB, like most high-stakes exam developers, relies on DIF (differential item functioning) analysis to assess for measurement bias at the item (question) level, as opposed to DTF (differential test functioning) analysis, which assesses for measurement bias at the test level.

ASWB defines bias at the *item-level only*

examdev <examdev@aswb.org> wrote:

Protocols for standardized testing require that bias be accounted for throughout the exam development process at the individual test question level. It is not the final pass rate data that is used to identify bias in exams. Every question on an ASWB examination is reviewed for signs of potential bias at each step in the process and is thoroughly and continually reviewed by testing experts and by ASWB's Examination Committee to make sure the exams meet and exceed standards for licensing exams. The social work licensing exams follow strict test development standards—set by the American Psychological Association, the Joint Commission on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, the American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. Questions identified as failing to accurately test candidates' knowledge, as well as those with potential bias, are not included on the exams.

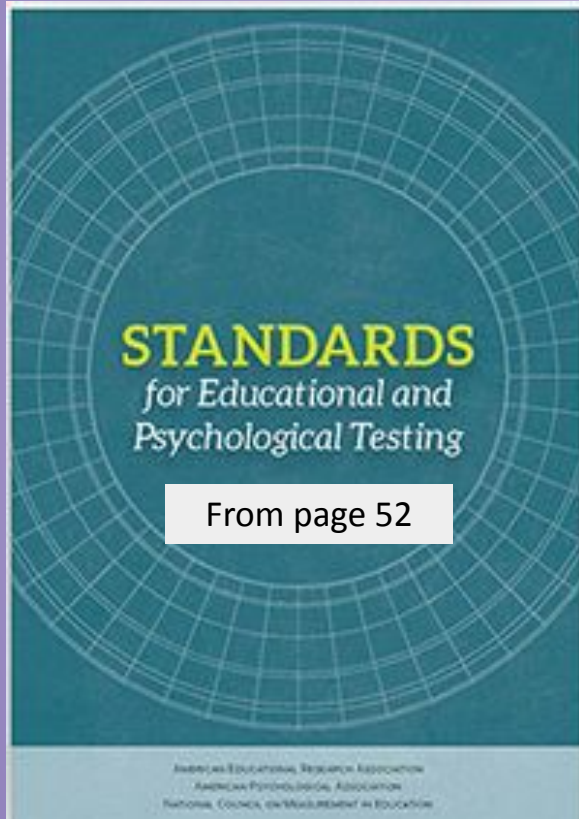
Source: Personal conversation
shared with #StopASWB campaign

Jacqueline Braxton, MSW, LCSW

she/her

Licensed Examination Development Project Coordinator

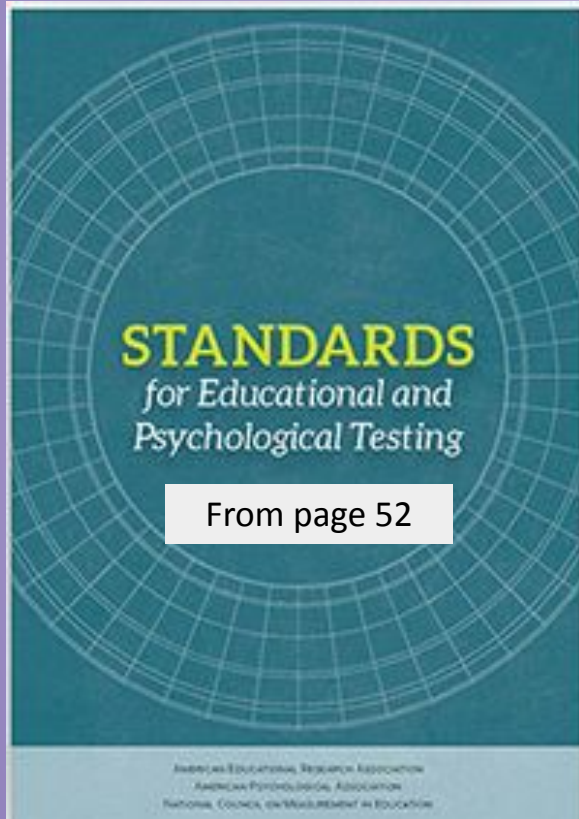
DIF & DTF measurements are required



From page 52

When credible evidence indicates potential bias in measurement (i.e., lack of consistent construct meaning across groups, DIF, DTF) or bias in predictive relations, these potential sources of bias should be independently investigated because the presence or absence of one form of such bias may have no relationship with other forms of bias. For example, a predictor test may show no significant levels of DIF, yet show group differences in regression lines in predicting a criterion.

DIF & DTF measurements are required



When credible evidence indicates potential bias in measurement (i.e., lack of consistent construct meaning across groups, DIF, DTF) or bias in predictive relations, these potential sources of bias should be independently investigated because the presence or absence of one form of such bias may have no relationship with other forms of bias. For example, a predictor test may show no significant levels of DIF, yet show group differences in regression lines in predicting a criterion.

ASWB misstates the purpose of DTF: Item removal



DIF vs. DTF



DTF analysis is the counterpart to DIF analysis and was initially proposed because item writing is an expensive and time-consuming effort and evaluating a test for measurement bias, and, in turn, remedying said bias, could be achieved by identifying the smallest number of items that could be removed such that the bias at the test level would cancel. (See, for example, Raju et al., 1995). This is in contrast to DIF analysis, which is a much more stringent, or conservative approach to test development, in that items are screened individually during pretesting, and items that are identified as biased are deleted or revised before using them as operational (i.e., scored) items.

ASWB uses a similarly conservative approach. Any item displaying DIF during pretesting is pulled from their pretest pool and does not make it into their pool of operational test items. If ASWB were to run DTF analyses and rely on that information to remove problematic items, it is highly likely that the results of those analyses would lead to removal of far fewer items than does the approach ASWB currently uses. ASWB is, nevertheless, exploring the potential value of using DTF analysis as an additional assurance of fairness.

Defined incorrectly, DTF sounds like a bad idea



DIF vs. DTF



Also, as discussed in the response to the previous question, discarding all items that exhibit DIF during pretesting is a more stringent approach to mitigating bias concerns than selectively removing DIF items from an operational test until DTF is negligible. Although it is theoretically possible that DIF analyses may fail to identify some problematic items and small amounts of bias may accumulate to produce DTF, it is very unlikely that practically important DTF will result, because there is often high power to detect small magnitudes of DIF, and DIF does not typically favor one examinee group consistently (e.g., Nye et al., 2011; Stark et al., 2004).

Are ASWB exams atypical? ASWB won't test it! (DTF)

Remember levels of measurement from research class?

Patterns emerge at all levels...

Individuals

Families & Groups

Communities & Organizations

Geographic areas & Politics

We measure differential functioning at all levels...

Each question & answer (DIF)

Multiple questions (subset DIF)

4 Content areas (DTF)

Exam as a whole (DTF)

ASWB's own source DTF is more important!

Differential item functioning (DIF) = is this question biased?

Differential test functioning (DTF) = is this test biased?

ASWB only analyzes for DIF. ASWB does not acknowledge DTF exists.

The Standards require specific DTF tests. ASWB cites two procedures for them!

From a practical standpoint, **DTF is the primary concern for organizations**, because **selection decisions are based on total test scores rather than individual items** (Stark et al., 2004, p. 498)

ASWB ignores its own citations on DTF & DIF



DIF vs. DTF

amounts of bias may accumulate to produce DTF, it is very unlikely that practically important DTF will result, because there is often high power to detect small magnitudes of DIF, and DIF does not typically favor one examinee group consistently (e.g., Nye et al., 2011; Stark et al., 2004).

Study 2: Examining the Effects of DTF on Professional Licensure Decisions

Licensure is a requirement for practice in many professional and technical disciplines. Even in fields in which it is not required, licensure usually increases one's income and opportunity for promotion. Differences in the quality and amount of education attained by members of different ethnic groups may lead to mean score differences on licensing exams, which, in turn, could produce differential certification rates. To address this concern and protect testing organizations from claims regarding test bias, one must determine whether observed mean differences are caused by DTF or by true differences in skills that affect performance.

To answer this question, one should conduct IRT DIF and DTF analyses to identify bias at the item and test levels. Then research should focus on the magnitudes of these effects when choosing a cut score for licensure (i.e., a standard setting) and making decisions about test revision.

Method

The DTF-Effect and DTF-RSR computer programs were used to analyze data from a nationally administered professional licensing exam ($N = 40,029$). Dichotomous data for 79 items were analyzed separately for Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites. Because these groups differed in sample size, 1,900 examinees were sampled randomly from each group for comparison.

ASWB responds directly to this point.



DIF vs. DTF



Doesn't page 52 of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education) specify that DTF (differential test functioning) analyses should be used to analyze for measurement bias?

ASWB response to DTF/psychometrics concerns so far

ASWB: *Standards* do not require DTF...



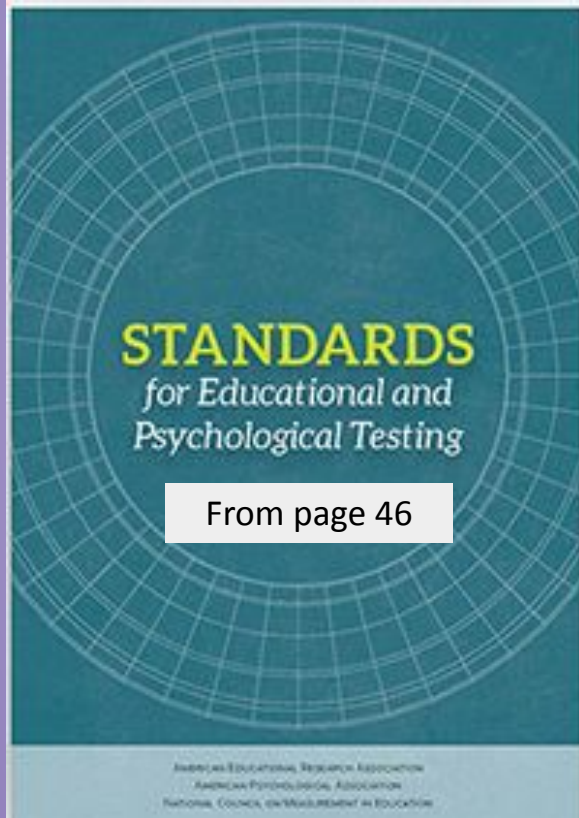
DIF vs. DTF



No. The parenthetical note on page 52 of the *Standards* where DTF is mentioned as part of a larger discussion focused on different types of bias, specifically that different types of biases should be evaluated independently of one another because they are not necessarily related. The note does *not* state that it is necessary to run DTF analyses as part of an exam development program, nor does it prescribe the use of any one particular analysis over another (or in tandem with each other) when evaluating for measurement bias. Rather, DTF, like DIF, is one of several approaches exam developers may use to evaluate measurement bias.

Impossible to reconcile with the text of Standard 2.14

Standards: DTF analyses required *immediately*



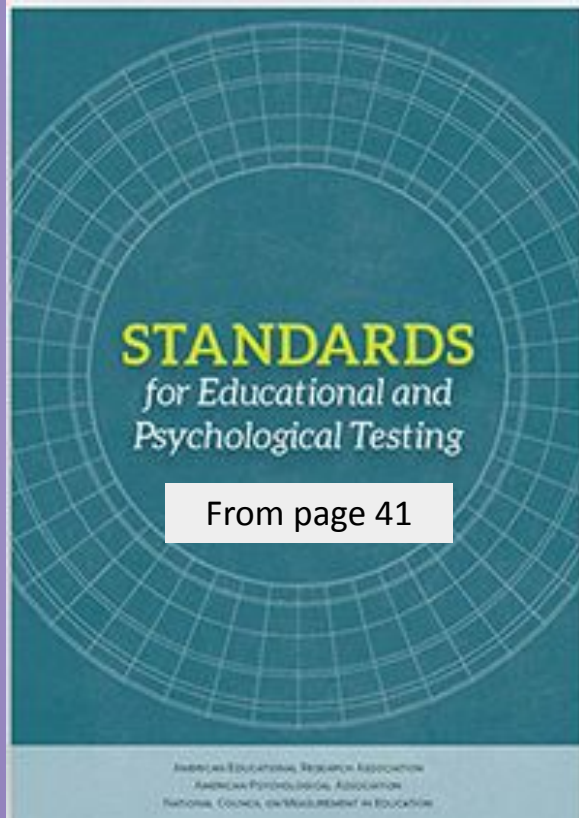
From page 46

Standard 2.15

When there is credible evidence for expecting that conditional standard errors of measurement or test information functions will differ substantially for various subgroups, investigation of the extent and impact of such differences should be undertaken and reported as soon as is feasible.

Comment: If differences are found, they should be clearly indicated in the appropriate documentation. In addition, if substantial differences do exist, the test content and scoring models should be examined to see if there are legally acceptable alternatives that do not result in such differences.

ASWB omits other required DTF tests



Standard 2.16: When a test or combination of measures is used to make classification decisions, estimates should be provided of the **percentage of test takers who would be classified in the same way on two replications of the procedure.** (p. 46)

Standard 2.11: Test publishers should provide estimates of reliability/precision **as soon as feasible for each relevant subgroup** for which the test is recommended.

Comment: Reporting estimates of reliability/precision for relevant subgroups is useful in many contexts, but it is especially important if the interpretation of scores involves within-group inferences (e.g., in terms of subgroup norms). For example, **test users who work with a specific linguistic and cultural subgroup or with individuals who have a particular disability would benefit from an estimate of the standard error for the subgroup.** (p. 45)

What does compliance look like? NCLEX example



Technical Manual for the
RN Comprehensive Predictor® 2019

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| Test Specifications | 7 |
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| Item Writer Training | 9 |
| Item Writing | 9 |
| Item Review | 10 |
| Test Administration | 12 |
| IV. Item Calibration and Test Equating | 13 |
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ASWB's only psychometric documentation since 2011

Cluster 8. Documenting Reliability/Precision

Standard 2.19

Each method of quantifying the reliability/precision of scores should be described clearly and expressed in terms of statistics appropriate to the method. The sampling procedures used to select test takers for reliability/precision analyses and the descriptive statistics on these samples, subject to privacy obligations where applicable, should be reported.

Comment: Information on the method of data collection, sample sizes, means, standard deviations, and demographic characteristics of the groups tested helps users judge the extent to which reported data apply to their own examinee populations. If the test-retest or alternate-form approach is used, the interval between administrations should be indicated.

ASWB and psychometrics

All ASWB exams are developed in accordance with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014)

- HumRRO has provided third-party psychometric oversight and recommendations since 2014

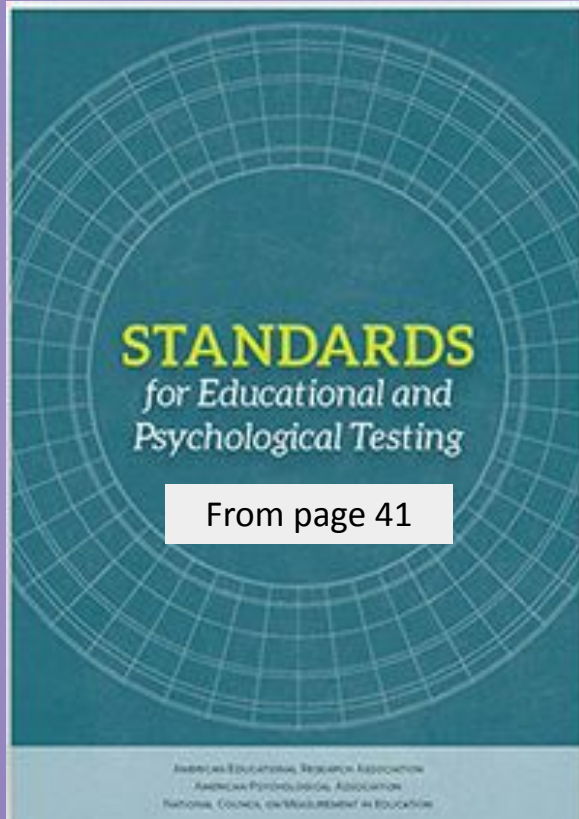
Reliability

- ASWB uses Cronbach's alpha to estimate reliability.
- Reliability estimates are consistently very high ($\alpha = .85 - .91$).

DIF analysis

- ASWB runs DIF analyses on all items.
- Items exhibiting statistically significant DIF are flagged, regardless of direction (typically < 5% of items), deleted, and reviewed.
- ASWB will explore the use of DTF analyses to identify additional information that may help explain pass rate differences.

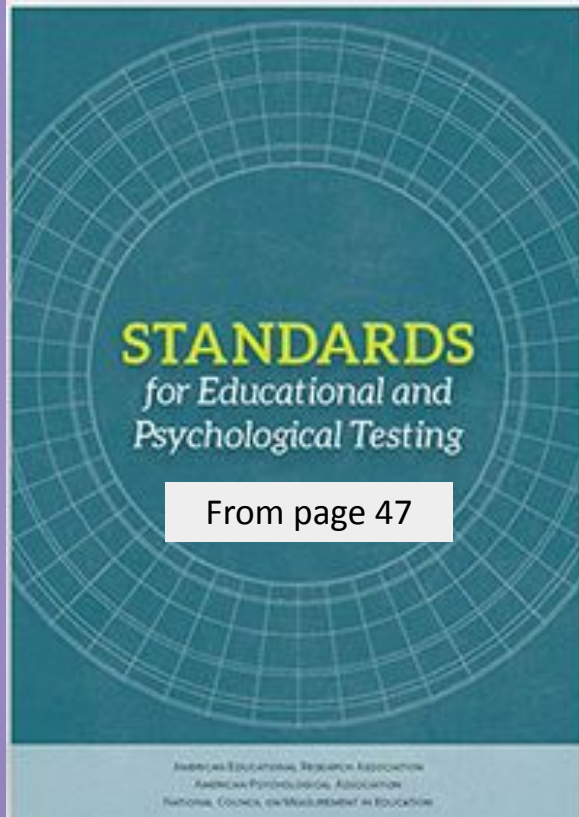
ASWB's reporting inadequate according to *Standards*



From page 41

The reporting of indices of reliability/precision alone—with little detail regarding the methods used to estimate the indices reported, the nature of the group from which the data were derived, and the conditions under which the data were obtained—constitutes inadequate documentation.

Missing Methods



From page 47

All ASWB exams are developed in accordance with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014)

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Reliability

- ASWB uses Cronbach's alpha to estimate reliability.
- Reliability estimates are consistently very high ($\alpha = .85 - .91$).

Because there are many ways of estimating reliability/precision, and each is influenced by different sources of measurement error, it is unacceptable to say simply, "The reliability/precision of scores on test X is .90." A better statement would be, "The reliability coefficient of .90 reported for scores on test X was obtained by correlating scores from forms A and B, administered on successive days. The data were based on a sample of 400 10th-grade students from five middle-class suburban schools in New York State. The demographic breakdown of this group was as follows: . . ." In some cases, for example, when

ASWB stopped testing IRT-based reliability after 2014

Recording

ASWB and psychometrics

All ASWB exams are developed in accordance with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014)

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- ASWB will explore the use of DTF analyses to identify additional information that may help explain pass rate differences.

The ASWB examinations have shown high reliability estimates, in the nineties, both by the **preferred advanced IRT model** (decision consistency in pass/fail decisions) and the **less relevant classical standards** (KR-20, test reliability measure as shown by its internal consistency)

In 2014, ASWB adopted “less relevant” reliability tests without apparent justification.

Research on Social Work Practice

<http://rsw.sagepub.com>

The Association of Social Work Boards' Licensure Examinations: A Review of Reliability and Validity Processes

Stephen M. Marson, Donna DeAngelis and Nisha Mittal
Research on Social Work Practice 2010; 20; 87
DOI: 10.1177/1049731509347858

Are 2018 & 2026 exams comparable?

Pre-2023 exams with only 4-item questions

2023-2026 exams with a mix of 3- and 4-item questions?

2026+ exams with only 3-item questions?

Untested equivalence assumptions

- 8% easier to guess

- 25% faster to read answer options

Major change?

- Demonstrate **measurement equivalence**

Standard 7.14

When substantial changes are made to a test, the test's documentation should be amended, supplemented, or revised to keep information for users current and to provide useful additional information or cautions.

Comment: Supporting documents should clearly note the date of their publication as well as the name or version of the test for which the documentation is relevant. When substantial changes are made to items and scoring, information on the extent to which the old scores and new scores are interchangeable should be included in the test documentation.

Sometimes it is necessary to change a test or testing procedure to remove construct-irrelevant variance that may arise due to the characteristics of an individual that are unrelated to the construct being measured (e.g., when testing individuals with disabilities). When a test or testing procedures are altered, the documentation for the test should include a discussion of how the alteration may affect the validity and comparability of the test scores, and evidence should be provided to demonstrate the effect of the alteration on the scores obtained from the altered test or testing procedures, if sample size permits.

ASWB's item-only analysis *misses* exam-level impacts



Three-option multiple choice phased in

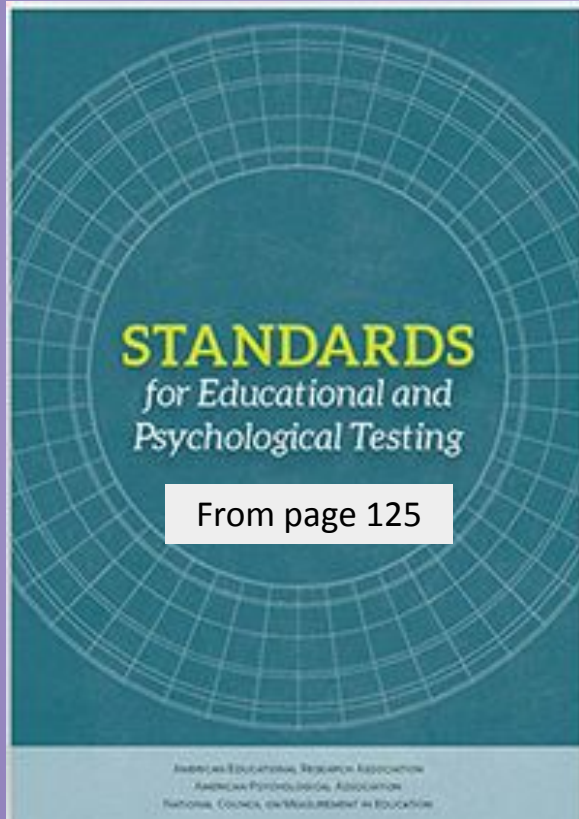
- Exam forms may contain both three- and four-option questions beginning in January 2023. The exam will gradually include more three-option questions going forward, with the goal of completing the transition by 2025.
- Exam questions with fewer options will offer test-takers a better experience by reducing time pressure and ensuring a focus on a test-taker's social work knowledge.
- This change follows psychometric expertise that confirms the validity of three-option multiple-choice questions.

True: 3-option vs. 4-option. Likely equally valid to use either item format (3 or 4)
BUT, are 3-item only, 4-item only, and 3-or-4-item exams equivalent?

Is the 2018 cut score still valid for these exams?

DTF: ensures validity of cut scores using real-world data...ASWB doesn't do it

ASWB does not provide data or methods to researchers, in violation of psychometric standards



Test documents should provide sufficient detail to permit reviewers and researchers to evaluate important analyses published in the test manual or technical report. For example, reporting correlation matrices in the test document may allow the test user to judge the data on which decisions and conclusions were based. Similarly, describing in detail the sample and the nature of factor analyses that were conducted may allow the test user to replicate reported studies.

Test documentation will also help those who are affected by the score interpretations to decide whether to participate in the testing program or how to participate if participation is not optional.

Two Competing

ASWB exams are no less fair than other exams.

Disparities are due to structural oppression.

“External, pipeline, and upstream factors”

– ASWB

Narratives

ASWB exams are uniquely unfair/invalid/unreliable.

Exams are uniquely unsuited to social work.

ASWB exams lack data & methods transparency.

- Research community

From “free from bias”...to “external factors” explanation

June 2014-June 2022



“Results over several years have shown that ASWB exams are statistically free from race and gender bias” (p. 3)

July 2022- Present

“There may be differences in exam performance outcomes for members of different demographic groups because exam performance is influenced by many factors external to the exams.” (p. 12)

ASWB to Researchers: Study our new hypothesis!

Candidate handbook 2022



“There may be differences in exam performance outcomes for members of different demographic groups because exam performance is influenced by many factors **external** to the exams.” (p. 12)

ASWB RFP 2023



“Research proposals might address correlating **external** variables [which] could include **upstream** factors such as education programs...intersectionality...life experiences from **early childhood** to post-graduate.” (p.1-2)

Conflicts of Interest & Competence Gaps in RFP Process



Research Committee Members

Tennessee Board of Social Workers

Texas Board of Social Worker Examiners

Kentucky Board of Social Work

Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners

Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers

North Carolina Social Work Certification and Licensure Board



No psychometric data sharing!

“Upstream” factors only

Awardees

- Former ASWB executive
- Former ASWB grantee
- ASWB member board

NDA required

ASWB had final edit

Kim & Joo's 3rd report disproves ASWB's hypothesis

Model 1: “the **odds of exam failure** for Asian examinees were **2.055x higher** than the odds for white examinees... and **6.483x higher** for Black examinees and **2.771x** for Hispanic/Latino examinees than the odds for their white counterparts...

Table 2. The Effects of Race/Ethnicity on First-Time Clinical Exam Failure, 2018-2022

| | Model 1 (M1) | | Model 2 (M2) | | Model 3 (M3) | | Percent (%) reduction in Odds Ratio between models | |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------|---|----------|---|----------|--|-----------|
| | Race/Ethnicity only | | Demographic, educational, and employment characteristics | | Demographic, educational, employment, institutional, and community characteristics | | | |
| | O.R. | <i>p</i> | O.R. | <i>p</i> | O.R. | <i>p</i> | M1 vs. M2 | M1 vs. M3 |
| Asian | 2.055 | *** | 1.868 | *** | 1.879 | *** | 9.10 | 8.56 |
| Black | 6.483 | *** | 6.019 | *** | 5.193 | *** | 7.16 | 19.90 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 2.771 | *** | 2.199 | *** | 2.009 | *** | 23.53 | 27.50 |
| (White) | | | | | | | | |

Notes: (1) O.R.: Odds Ratio; (2) *** $p < 0.001$; (3) Reference group is in parenthesis

The full model (Model 3) odds of exam failure for Black examinees relative to the odds of white examinees' reduced by 19.90% from **6.483x to 5.193x**. For Hispanic /Latino examinees, the odds of failure declined 27.50% from **2.771x to 2.009x**”

ASWB: 1.8-5.2x is SO MUCH BETTER than 2.1-6.2x!



Pass rates in context: An exam report series

To more precisely contextualize pass rates by analyzing the systemic factors that influence exam outcomes, ASWB partnered with Joy Kim, MSW, Ph.D., of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.


Dr. Kim's findings suggest that if historically marginalized groups had **access and opportunities** similar to those of white examinees and experienced equitable institutional and community environments, **the pass rate gap would narrow significantly**. With more complete data — if test-takers' **academic backgrounds and performances** could be obtained, for example — it is likely that more could be understood about the sources of pass rate disparities.

ASWB found similar results for BSW licensees

Research Article

Racial Disparities in Social Workers' Licensing Rates

Joy Jeounhee Kim¹ 

Research on Social Work Practice
2022, Vol. 32(4) 374–387
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DOI: 10.1177/10497315211066907
journals.sagepub.com/home/rsw


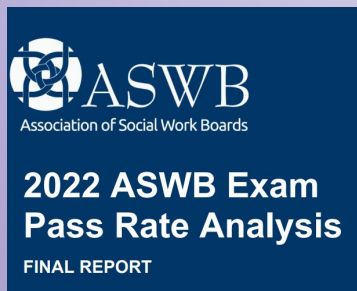
censing. None of those factors—variations in state regulations, the field of practice, the type of employers, and social workers' demographic vulnerability—helped to explain away the African American—White disparity in the odds of licensing for bachelor social workers. The odds of African American social workers holding any license were 43% lower than the odds of White social workers. For a required license, the odds of African Americans were 56% lower than those of Whites.

2018 Introduced *Internal* exam flaws

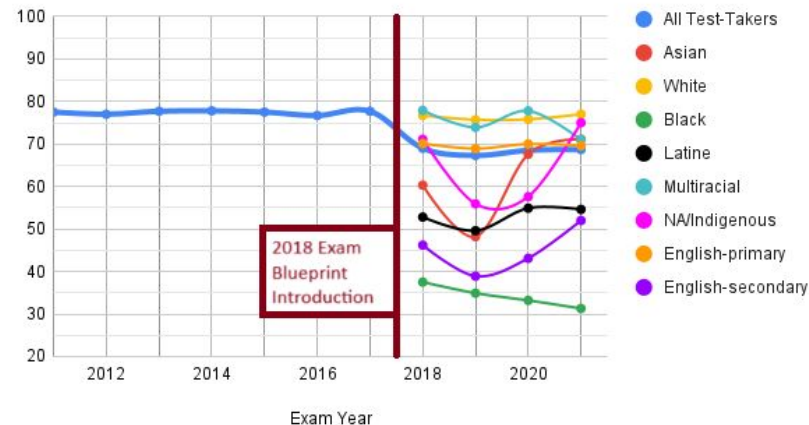
“First-time pass rates decreased slightly (~9 percent) between 2017 and 2018... most likely because of the introduction of a new exam blueprint”

- ASWB, 2022

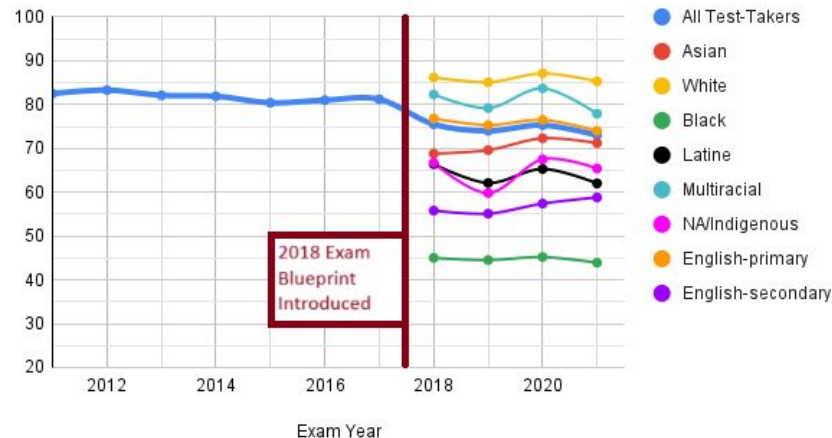
ASWB omitted pre-2018 equity data.



Impact of 2018 Blueprint on Bachelors Exam Pass Rates by Demographic



Impact of 2018 Blueprint on Masters Exam Pass Rates by Demographic



Why are 2017 exams so much better? External factors?

Examination Program

Attached for your review are the 2016 year end examination statistics, which includes the school examination results. Examination statistics for 2017 are also provided. A total 5,784 examinations were administered in the third quarter of fiscal year 2016/2017.

| | 3rd Qtr | | 2nd Qtr | | 1st Qtr | |
|----------------|----------------|--------|------------------|--------|----------------|--------|
| | 1/1/17-3/31-17 | | 10/1/16-12/31/16 | | 7/1/16-9/30/16 | |
| | Total Exams | Pass % | Total Exams | Pass % | Total Exams | Pass % |
| LMFT L/E* | 2187 | 65% | 2954 | 69% | 3679 | 71% |
| LMFT Clinical* | 983 | 54% | 1246 | 71% | 1026 | 73% |
| LCSW L/E* | 1613 | 71% | 2403 | 67% | 3386 | 72% |
| LCSW ASWB | 689 | 77% | 860 | 80% | 572 | 81% |
| LPCC L/E* | 252 | 67% | 323 | 59% | 312 | 76% |
| LPCC NCMHCE | 28 | 86% | 39 | 74% | 26 | 65% |
| LEP* | 32 | 72% | 36 | 56% | 53 | 51% |

*Board developed examination

Evidence of invalidity

No public protection
data

Cultural & linguistic
bias

Removing scored
items for biased
functioning!

No exams? No problem!

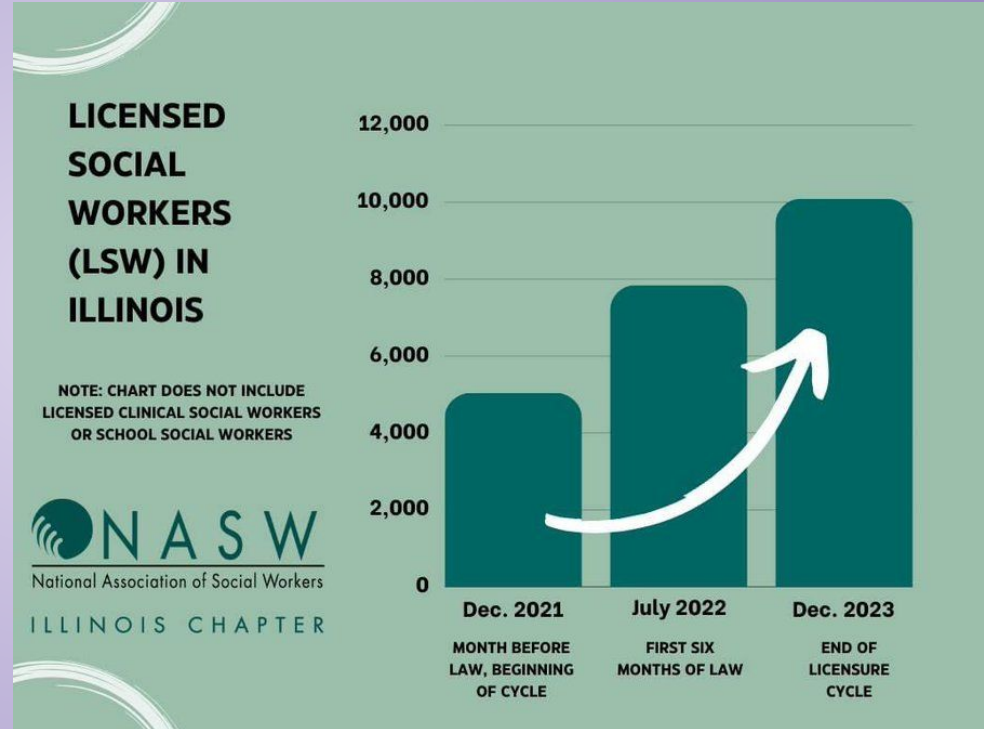
of states not requiring examination doubled 2022-2025

15 states do not use BSW exams

11 states do not use MSW exams

2 states offer alt. LCSW pathways

10+ states considered similar bills since 2022



Do ASWB exams protect the public?

Research on Social Work Practice

Impact Factor: **1.8** / 5-Year Impact Factor: **2.2**

[JOURNAL HOMEPAGE](#)

[SUBMIT PAPER](#)

 Restricted access | Research article | First published online August 24, 2022

Effects of Social Work Licensure Exemptions: Theoretical Propositions, Evidence, and Research Agendas

[Joy Jeounghee Kim](#)   [View all authors and affiliations](#)

[Volume 33, Issue 1](#) | <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315221118106>

The lack of empirical evidence makes it hard to assess if the theorized effects of licensure exemptions are realized on the service quality, prices, and accessibilities.

Extant evidence, albeit scant, implies that licensure may not eliminate lower-quality services but benefit incumbent social workers with higher earnings.



Do exams protect the public?

“Kinderknecht’s [1995 dissertation analyzing Kansas board complaints] may provide the **only available evidence supporting the use of a standardized licensure exam** as part of licensure requirements.

It is the **only empirical study** beyond simply describing the type and prevalence of complaints and violations, **examining factors related to the substantiation of ethical violations.**”

From the 2023 ASWB Education Conference:
The art and science of social work regulations: How values and data should guide regulatory practices



Presenter:
Joy Kim, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey



Cultural bias is baked into the exam

JOURNAL ARTICLE

“I Was Told to Think Like a Middle-Aged White Woman”: A Survey on Identity and the Association of Social Work Boards Exam

[Get access >](#)

Maria Elena Torres ✉, Sunny Maguire, Jennie Kogan

Social Work, swae001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swae001>

Published: 16 February 2024 **Article history** ▼

[Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work >](#)

Volume 28, 2019 - Issue 2

1,618 9

Views

CrossRef citations to date

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Original Article

Microaggressions and racial privilege within the social work profession: The social work licensing examinations

Graciela Castex ✉, Evan Senreich, Norma Kolko Phillips, Conard Mark Miller & Carl Mazza

Pages 211-228 | Published online: 20 Dec 2018

Ethnocentric test advice = Invalidity

“Think like a white person”

“Think like the test writer”

“Don’t answer what you would actually do in practice”

Call CPS, the cops, your supervisor

Ignore racial microaggressions

Use white-dominant theories

Ignore the need for context & detail

ASWB exams test linguistic cues & cultural knowledge

MSW students guess
correctly 52% of time
without the question text

ChatGPT guess correctly
80% LMSW
76% LBSW
64% LCSW

JOURNAL ARTICLE

A Test of the Validity of the LCSW Examination: *Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes?* [Get access >](#)



David L. Albright, MSW, Bruce A. Thyer, PhD, LCSW ✉

Social Work Research, Volume 34, Issue 4, December 2010, Pages 229–234, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.sju.edu/10.1093/swr/34.4.229>



Published: 01 December 2010 **Article history ▼**

Research on Social Work Practice

Impact Factor: 1.8 / 5-Year Impact Factor: 2.2 JOURNAL P

 Open access |  | Research article | First published online March 27, 2023

Time to Move Beyond the ASWB Licensing Exams: Can Generative Artificial Intelligence Offer a Way Forward for Social Work?

[Bryan G. Victor](#)  ✉, [Sheryl Kubiak](#), [...], and [Brian E. Perron](#)  [View all authors and affiliations](#)

[Volume 33, Issue 5](#) | <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315231166125>

ASWB removes scored items for biased stats

On page 23 in [ASWB's \(2023\) examination guidebook](#):



“All ASWB examination questions are monitored to ensure that there is nothing in the content that would provide an advantage to one demographic group over another. This evaluation occurs during the pretest phase—before questions are included in the scored question bank—and **continues while they are used as scored questions**” (ASWB, 2023, p. 21).

In a [2020 article in Social Work Today](#), ASWB Examination Director Lavina Harless confirmed:

“Monitoring of item performance doesn’t end once an item moves out of pretest status. **Scored items are continually monitored** to ensure that performance doesn’t slip. **If a scored item demonstrates a statistically significant drop** in performance, it **is taken out of use and returned to the examination committee for review**. Should the committee decide to edit and keep the item, it returns to pretest status” (para. 12).

Putting Social Work Values to the Test — ASWB’s Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
By Lavina Harless, MSW, LCSW
Social Work Today
Vol. 20 No. 3 P. 24

The role of the Association of Social Work Boards is to maintain the high quality and rigor of social work licensing exams, but it is also tasked with ensuring that social work’s mission, values, and ethics are reflected in the exams.



The licensing examinations for social workers across the country

Invalid licensure decisions, variable cut scores

In 2023, Person A failed by 1-2 points.

In 2024, ASWB removed an exam item from Person A's test for biased functioning (DIF)..

Person A's true 2023 cut score changed.

Without that biased item, Person A would have passed & gotten licensed.

Exam scores trigger automatic licensure decisions

ASWB does not update the score report, boards, or test-takers.

How often does this happen? Up to 8 items per test.

How Does ASWB Guard Against Bias on the Social Work Licensing Exams?

Like this article? Thank you for sharing!



by Stacey Owens, MSW, LCSW-C



DIF is identified by statistically analyzing responses to the exam questions—called items—during pretesting.

Scored items are continually monitored for DIF. On an annual basis, less than 5% of all items released show DIF. Items flagged for DIF are removed from the bank of potential exam questions.

What is next?

Information

- Fact Sheets
- [socialwork.one](https://www.socialwork.one)- NADD website

Discussion

Discord

Imagination

Alternative Pathways

Action

Contacting BOSW

Q&A



Download our fact sheets. Adapt for your state!



Uniquely Biased



Status Quo

Read our preprints (forthcoming in Advances in Social Work)



Read more about scored items removed for bias (matt preprint)



Download our references and this slideshow

Resolution 362-A and Social Work Workforce Act

Pamela Clipper

Participant ID: #####

Good afternoon, my name is Pamela Clipper. I work as a Program Specialist at a city New York City government agency for over 30 years. I am a social worker that provide program oversight and monitoring for 19 adult mobile crisis teams in NYC. I am also here today as a member of Social Workers for Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's Workforce Hearing.

I am testifying today in support of Resolution 362-A which is in support of the Social Work Workforce Act. This legislation would eliminate the entry level ASWB licensing exam as a condition for licensure because of its long standing and national extreme racial biases in pass rates and that it lacks any evidence that it scientifically measures the competence of social workers. This exam excludes the very social workers we most need from practicing- those who reflect the populations we serve in high need communities and public and non- profit agencies. These social workers are desperately needed to work in schools, shelters, mental health teams, child welfare agencies, with the homeless, older adults, immigrants and justice impacted families. Social workers offer 75% of all mental health services and if we want to address the City's mental health crisis, we urgently need them and we need them now.

As a Social Worker, I deeply feel the impact of this exam – and here's why. I earned my Master of Social Work with a Clinical concentration in 2016 and completed a 600-hour supervised internship. In 2017, I took the ASWB Master's-level exam for the first time. I failed, and it left me feeling like a failure. The experience was so discouraging that I didn't attempt it again until 2021 – only to fail once more. I was beyond devastated. I spent two days in bed crying, knowing how much I had sacrificed. I had invested countless hours studying, paid for prep materials, tutoring, and courses – spending thousands of dollars. I even put my family life on hold to focus on passing. Now, I'm scheduled to take the exam again in November 2025. I'm petrified, but I have no choice – otherwise, I lose another \$300. This test has not only cost me financially, but emotionally and professionally as well.

My story is not unique: 49% of Black social work graduates and 62% of Latino graduates in New York State do not pass this biased exam. They are closed out of the very jobs that they are educated to hold, and oftentimes, these are jobs they have already worked in before they entered school, or during the intensive internships completed as part of their masters programs. When Illinois passed similar legislation in 2022, they welcomed 10,000 new social workers in two years. Rhode Island doubled their workforce. We are likely to see an increase of 20,000 social workers when the exam is eliminated. They will deliver the essential mental health services that New York City, and New York State needs.

To summarize, I submit this testimony in support of the Resolution submitted by Council Member Bottcher, and the Social Work Workforce Act as sponsored by Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas. Thank you for your time.

Advocating for the Elimination of the ASWB Exam: A Call for Equity in Social Work

The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exam has long served as a gateway to professional licensure. However, it has disproportionately harmed minority populations, leading to the unjust loss of talented social workers, diminishing the workforce, and straining the very communities these professionals strive to uplift. This discriminatory barrier must be dismantled to ensure that true expertise—rooted in experience, empathy, and commitment—prevails over standardized test-taking ability.

Many exceptional social workers have found out that they are trapped in a cycle of anxiety and distress due to the exam. A situation where our careers, livelihoods, and the well-being of our families hinge on a test that favors those adepts at standardized testing over those with invaluable hands-on experience. The pressure to pass causes mental stress and burnout, further reducing productivity and eroding self-esteem. Even those who excel in practice can face setbacks that ultimately force them out of the profession, thereby depriving communities of crucial support systems.

The elimination of this exam would mitigate the growing strain on the current workforce. The burden of heavy caseloads intensifies, leading to overworked and under-supported social workers. Removing this obstacle would help build a more inclusive and sustainable workforce, allowing professionals to focus on their essential mission: serving communities in need.

Licensure should reflect the depth of a social worker's knowledge, skill set, and ethical commitment—not merely their ability to pass a standardized test. By prioritizing practical experience and alternative evaluations, the profession can uphold its integrity and ensure that the most capable individuals remain in their roles. A shift toward equitable licensure via years of experience/practices will strengthen social services, protect mental health professionals, and foster lasting positive change.

Now is the time to advocate for reform. The ASWB exam must be eliminated, reevaluated to create a fair and inclusive pathway for all social workers, ensuring that those with the passion and experience necessary to uplift communities are not unjustly denied the opportunity to serve.

Thank you

Paul, CA

June 18, 2025

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Rafael Sarduy. I'm a public school social worker in Jamaica, Queens in D28 and a proud Bronx resident. For the past six years, I've dedicated my life to serving children and families across the five boroughs, especially those who, like me, are navigating systems that weren't built with us in mind. I am a Latino gay man, and I bring that identity into my work every day, providing students with the kind of culturally responsive, affirming support I wish I had growing up.

Despite my passion, my training, and my impact, I've taken the LMSW exam six times and failed each time. I currently hold a provisional certification for school social work. But that certification will expire in two years. And if I do not pass the LMSW exam by then, I will lose the job I love so dearly. Not because I'm unqualified. Not because I haven't done the work. But because of a standardized test that has little to do with the realities of social work practice and everything to do with systemic inequities.

This exam does not measure compassion. It does not measure crisis intervention, trauma-informed care, or the ability to build trust with a child who has been through the unimaginable. But these are the things I do every day.

This exam has become a barrier, one that disproportionately locks out Black, Brown, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ professionals. It has created a pipeline of exclusion in a profession that claims to be rooted in justice.

I am asking you, imploring you to consider what we are losing when we let this test dictate who gets to stay in this field. We lose diversity, we lose lived experience, and we lose heart. And in doing so, we fail the very communities we are supposed to serve.

It is time to eliminate the LMSW exam as a requirement for licensure and to create alternative, equitable pathways that reflect the true values of social work.

Thank you,

Rafael Sarduy

Testimony to the New York City Council Regarding Resolution #362 Supporting the Social Work Workforce Act

My name is Scott Auwarter. I am a 1988 graduate of the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College and a Licensed Master Social Worker in New York State. Until my retirement in October 2023, I served as an Assistant Executive Director at BronxWorks for over three decades, where I oversaw the organization's homeless services programs. These included family and adult shelters, safe havens, street outreach, supportive housing, HIV/AIDS services, and foster care prevention programs. At the time of my retirement, I was responsible for services reaching more than 1,000 clients and supervised approximately 500 employees, including over 50 licensed social workers.

I am here today to respectfully express my opposition to Resolution #362 and the Social Work Workforce Act, which proposes to eliminate the requirement for entry-level social workers to pass the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exam as a condition of licensure.

Every profession that serves the public is grounded in a foundation of standardized knowledge, verified through a formal examination. If a profession cannot demonstrate its practitioners possess specialized knowledge, it is not, by definition, a profession.

Physicians, certified public accountants, architects, engineers, licensed master plumbers – and even barbers and cosmetologists—must pass rigorous licensing exams to practice. While these exams may not and could never be expected to every possible career trajectory, these exams play an essential role in ensuring a foundational level of competence – a minimum standard of competence required to perform a job. Social work, a profession that regularly serves individuals in crisis and distress, should not be an exception.

Licensed social workers serve as vital public safeguards. In hospitals, they are responsible for ensuring safe discharges—often in complex cases involving homelessness, serious mental illness, or inadequate support systems. In schools, they are key to students' emotional, academic, and social well-being, working across prevention, intervention, and long-term care. In mental health emergencies, licensed social workers are part of mobile crisis teams empowered to issue involuntary removal orders for psychiatric evaluation—an authority shared only with physicians, licensed psychologists, and registered nurses, all of whom must pass rigorous licensure exams. The ability to temporarily suspend an individual's right to self-determination demands the utmost care, training, and professional judgment.

The racial disparities seen in ASWB exam pass rates are also seen in other professions, including medicine. But the disparity in outcomes does not in itself demonstrate bias. That can only be demonstrated by scientific analysis of the questions and determining if they actually test knowledge that all social workers should possess. The medical field uses tools such as Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis and Bias/Sensitivity Reviews (BSR) to identify and address biased test items. Similarly, the American Bar Association adopted Standard 316, which holds law schools accountable for a minimum bar passage rate of 75% within two years of graduation—ensuring institutions are responsible for adequately preparing students for professional practice.

Deciding that because one is concerned about the outcome of a test that there should be no test is not only irrational; it jeopardizes the profession and the people it serves by abandoning any standards or knowledge and professional competence.

It is crucial to recognize that many individuals served by social workers in New York City are from economically disadvantaged and racially marginalized communities. Lowering the licensure standard for those serving these populations risks creating a dual standard of care—one in which underprivileged communities are seen as undeserving of professionally competent services. Equity does not mean different standards; it means ensuring everyone has access to the same high-quality, well-prepared professionals.

Yes, there is a documented shortage of licensed social workers. But the solution lies not in diminishing professional expectations. Rather, we should elevate the profession—through better compensation, greater public awareness of social workers' contributions, and institutional respect. Too often, social work is misunderstood or undervalued, and the title "social worker" is used loosely by individuals without formal training. Promoting a true understanding of the social work profession will attract bright, committed young people, especially from underrepresented communities, to pursue and excel in the field.

Finally, I find it deeply problematic to assume, implicitly or explicitly, that Black and Latino social workers are less capable of passing licensing examinations. This assumption is not only unfounded but harmful. It underestimates the potential of talented individuals of color and does nothing to address the root causes of disparities in educational access, preparation, and institutional support.

In closing, I urge the Council to oppose Resolution #362. Upholding rigorous and fair professional standards is essential—not only to protect clients but to preserve the integrity and future of the social work profession.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SHARON HER

Brooklyn, NY 11203

June 18, 2025

New York City Council
City Hall Park
New York, NY 10007
Re: Resolution 362-A Supporting the Social Work Workforce Act

Dear Council Members and General Welfare Committee members,

Thank you for your time and for listening to my testimony.

I am a Hmong American who was born in Laos, raised in the United States and has lived in New York City for over 23 years. My father helped the CIA in the fight against communism in Laos during the Vietnam War. As refugees in the USA, my father taught me that in America, we not only had the chance but the obligation to learn, grow, and give back.

Following his example, I have worked and volunteered in the community my entire life; I taught Sunday School for over 10 years, conducted writing workshops at my local library in Flatbush Brooklyn, and I co-created and led Hmong NYC, a thriving network of young professionals. I have actively given my time freely to create a better community because I want the same thing you do, a better world for everyone.

Now, at the age of 51, I want to serve the world in a different capacity, by becoming a Social Worker. Although he passed in 2020, my father's message is forever instilled in me: learning, growing, and giving never stops. Although I understand the time, dedication and cost for school will be high, I know it will be worth it because I see the great need in my community.

However, my understanding is that the ASWB exam, which is required to practice in New York, is extremely expensive, difficult to pass and racially biased. I have met and spoken with many Social Worker colleagues who have mentioned these concerns to me when I ask about their experiences.

Knowing that this test is so difficult and biased against me is very discouraging indeed. I think I would be a great Social Worker, I have worked with youth, troubled adults, seniors and the differently abled my whole life and I find the work very rewarding and ceaseless, that is why I want to do more and commit my life more fully to this field.

Please help eliminate this barrier from me by voting in favor of Resolution 362-A Supporting the Social Work Workforce Act.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sh' followed by a stylized flourish.

Sharon Her

Testimony in Support of the Social Work Workforce Act

Delivered by Shavonna Smith

City Hall, June 17, 2025

Good afternoon,

My name is Shavonna Smith, and I am a Black woman, a future social worker, and someone who has experienced firsthand the consequences of poverty, displacement, and systemic neglect. I was raised in Brownsville, Brooklyn—a community rich in resilience but long underserved, over-policed, and under-resourced. I also experienced homelessness. These are not just abstract challenges to me; they are my lived reality. And they are the daily reality for far too many of our neighbors.

Today, I stand in strong support of the Social Work Workforce Act, and I urge this body to recognize that the current licensure process reinforces inequities rather than removing them.

The social work licensing exam has shown clear racial disparities in pass rates. Black and brown candidates consistently pass at lower rates than white candidates—not because of a lack of talent or commitment, but because the exam itself reflects cultural bias, academic gatekeeping, and institutional racism. When we tie access to this profession to a biased exam, we shut out the very people who best understand and can serve our most vulnerable communities.

The clients most impacted by poverty, violence, and trauma deserve social workers who understand their struggles not just from textbooks, but from lived experience. Social workers who've had to survive in the same systems they now aim to change. Social workers like me.

Eliminating the licensing exam barrier is not about lowering standards—it is about redefining them in ways that are equitable and just. It's about recognizing that cultural competence, trauma-informed care, and community trust cannot be measured by a standardized test. Those skills are lived and earned.

We need social workers who can walk into a shelter or a public housing building and be seen as an ally, not an outsider. We need Black and brown social workers in schools, hospitals, and family services—especially in neighborhoods like Brownsville—who can serve with both compassion and cultural fluency.

I ask you to support the Social Work Workforce Act so that we can build a workforce that reflects the diversity of New York City and meets the real needs of our people. This is not just policy; this is personal. And it's long overdue.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to equity.

Good afternoon, my name is Susan Graves and I'm a licensed master social worker with NMIC (Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation); I work with young adults in the YouthBuild program, which supports young people as they advance their education. Thank you, Committee on General Welfare for hearing me today; I'm also here as a member of Social Workers for Justice.

I want to speak about Resolution 362-A, which would support the Social Work Workforce Act in the NY State legislature. The ASWB licensing exam is not evidence based, and does not measure competence in social work practice. In social work, evidence based is a gold standard, not a buzzword.

Beyond being unscientific, the licensing exam has shown racial bias and is a barrier to those who are needed most in this field – those who represent the communities we serve. You might be thinking, “Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals take license exams to practice in their fields, why is this any different?” I'll tell you – the social work exam has a racial discrepancy in pass rates of 30% -- 3 times greater than the bar exam, or medical licensing exams.

As social workers, we are charged with promoting social justice – advocating for a world that doesn't favor the "haves" over the "have nots".

This exam measures privilege, not competence. If we champion social justice in the communities we serve, our profession should uphold this same value. It is hypocritical and unjust to ask social workers to be above ethical reproach while maintaining structures that divide us, undermining candidates that are just as deserving, if not more.

This test was designed for people who look like me, think like me, and speak like me; it is biased against those who speak English as a second language. The communities we serve need culturally competent services, in languages that they speak. The exam assures that communities in this great and diverse city are underserved and left out. This is not acceptable. I passed the exam on the first try, but it greatly pains me that exam gave me a hand up, and left others behind. It's up to me to stand by my values and advocate for an end to this exam.

Please support Resolution 362-A, and the social work workforce act. Thank you again, committee members.

Testimony in Support of the Social Worker Workforce Act

Submitted by: Tamika Mapp

As a mother of a grown child who depends on the care and guidance of a social worker, I am writing in strong support of the Social Worker Workforce Act. My son has been waiting nearly three years to be seen by a social worker—three years of missed opportunities for stability, growth, and healing. The only alternative presented to us was hospitalization, which is not a true solution, but a result of a system that is deeply under-resourced.

This is not just our family's story. Across New York City, there are thousands of children and adult children falling through the cracks because there simply aren't enough trained social workers available to meet the growing demand. Mental health care shouldn't be a luxury or a crisis-based service—it should be accessible, proactive, and available when someone needs it, not years later.

The Social Worker Workforce Act is a crucial step toward rebuilding a system that is stretched far too thin. It would help ensure that families like mine don't have to wait until things reach a breaking point. By investing in recruiting, training, and retaining social workers, New York can give every individual—not just those in crisis—the support they deserve.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. I urge you to pass the Social Worker Workforce Act to help our families access timely and life-changing care.

Sincerely,

Tamika Mapp

Mother, Advocate, and New Yorker

Testimony on Resolution 362
“Social Worker Workforce Act”
New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
June 18, 2025

My name is Will Doyle, LICSW and I am highly in favor of this bill. I am the Vice President of Housing First at Pathways to Housing DC and have been a licensed social worker in Washington, DC for over 17 years.

The ASWB released exam pass rate data in August 2022, calling into question whether we can continue to rely on ASWB exams as part of social work licensing requirements. If there was any evidence of their underlying value, then finding ways to fix these exams to address pass rate disparities could be a reasonable response. However, in over 40 years of use no such data has been produced. Instead, the ASWB exams act as a significant barrier to having the diverse social worker workforce that communities across the United States, particularly New York City, need.

In being involved in legislative efforts to remove the ASWB exam requirement in DC and Maryland, I directly experienced opposition testimony, which primarily came from the ASWB, Boards of Social Work, and social workers who benefit from keeping the exam requirement in place. However, in all of their testimonies, nobody provided proof that the ASWB exams are reliable and valid, that the ASWB exams follow industry standards for psychometrics, or that passing the ASWB exams is correlated with competence, ethical practice of social work, and public protection. You will hear such claims about the ASWB exams in opposition to this resolution, but I urge you to look to data to guide your vote.

From March 2020 to February 2024, 93 unlicensed social workers, individuals with a BSW or MSW from accredited social work programs, applied for a Case Manager position at Pathways to Housing DC. From July 2022 to February 2024, 19 unlicensed social workers applied for supervisor positions at Pathways to Housing DC. In the midst of the COVID pandemic we were unable to hire any of these applicants to support efforts to provide housing for individuals experiencing homelessness due to licensure requirements. From 2011 to 2021, the period of the released ASWB pass rate data, DC would have had an additional 474 (see attached) licensed social workers if all test takers passed at the white pass rate. DC had significant unused housing vouchers at this time that went unused due to workforce shortages exacerbated by the use of the ASWB exams.

The use of the ASWB exams has also greatly contributed to social worker workforce shortages in New York. From 2011 to 2021, the period of the released ASWB pass rate data, New York would have had an additional 3,559 (see attached) licensed social workers if all test takers passed at the white pass rate. Imagine all that these missing social workers could have done on behalf of New York if not barred from licensure by the ASWB's exams.

This legislation would remove the ASWB exam requirement for the Licensed Master Social Worker license. This aligns with positions by the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education, and the National Association of Deans and Directors, as well as 13 states that do not require the ASWB Masters exam for licensure.

I urge the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare to support Resolution 362.

Thank you!

Will Doyle, LICSW
Vice President of Housing First

Pathways to Housing DC
wedoyle@pathwaysdc.org

DC ASWB Eventual Pass Rates for 2011 to 2021 (from <https://www.aswb.org/exam/contributing-to-the-conversation/aswb-exam-pass-rates-by-state-province/>)

| Bachelors Exam | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Actual Data | | | Adjusted Data | | | |
| Demographic | Group | # Test-Takers | Pass Rate | # Passed | # Passed (White Pass Rate) | Missing Social Workers |
| Race/Ethnicity | Asian | 3 | | | | |
| | Black | 36 | 33.3% | 12 | 32 | 20 |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 7 | | | | |
| | Multiracial | 2 | | | | |
| | White | 18 | 88.9% | | | |
| Gender | Men | 10 | 70.0% | | | |
| | Women | 58 | 55.2% | | | |
| Age | 18-29 | 32 | 75.0% | | | |
| | 30-39 | 20 | 60.0% | | | |
| | 40-49 | 4 | | | | |
| | 50 and older | 12 | 16.7% | | | |
| Language | English | 57 | 59.6% | | | |
| | Non-English | 11 | 45.5% | | | |
| Masters Exam | | | | | | |
| Actual Data | | | Adjusted Data | | | |
| Demographic | Group | # Test-Takers | Pass Rate | # Passed | # Passed (White Pass Rate) | Missing Social Workers |
| Race/Ethnicity | Asian | 48 | 85.4% | 41 | 48 | 7 |
| | Black | 878 | 70.5% | 619 | 871 | 252 |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 127 | 81.1% | 103 | 126 | 23 |
| | Multiracial | 44 | 90.9% | 40 | 44 | 4 |
| | Native American/Indigenous Peoples | 1 | | | | |
| | White | 889 | 99.2% | | | |
| Gender | Men | 303 | 77.6% | | | |
| | Women | 1,754 | 86.0% | | | |
| Age | 18-29 | 1,042 | 90.1% | | | |
| | 30-39 | 653 | 85.0% | | | |
| | 40-49 | 209 | 69.9% | | | |
| | 50 and older | 153 | 67.3% | | | |
| Language | English | 1,925 | 85.7% | | | |
| | Non-English | 132 | 71.2% | | | |
| Clinical Exam | | | | | | |
| Actual Data | | | Adjusted Data | | | |
| Demographic | Group | # Test-Takers | Pass Rate | # Passed | # Passed (White Pass Rate) | Missing Social Workers |
| Race/Ethnicity | Asian | 40 | 90.0% | 36 | 39 | 3 |
| | Black | 747 | 75.4% | 563 | 724 | 161 |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 99 | 91.9% | 91 | 96 | 5 |
| | Multiracial | 36 | 94.4% | 34 | 35 | 1 |
| | Native American/Indigenous Peoples | 3 | | | | |
| | White | 801 | 96.9% | | | |
| Gender | Men | 246 | 77.6% | | | |
| | Women | 1,551 | 87.9% | | | |
| Age | 18-29 | 451 | 96.7% | | | |
| | 30-39 | 868 | 89.4% | | | |
| | 40-49 | 272 | 75.4% | | | |
| | 50 and older | 206 | 67.0% | | | |
| Language | English | 1,701 | 86.9% | | | |
| | Non-English | 96 | 80.2% | | | |
| | | | | Missing Bachelors Social Workers (LSWA) | | 20 |
| | | | | Missing Masters Social Workers (LGSW) | | 285 |
| | | | | Missing Clinical Social Workers (LICSW) | | 169 |
| | | | | Total Missing Social Workers | | 474 |

NY ASWB Eventual Pass Rates for 2011 to 2021 (from <https://www.aswb.org/exam/contributing-to-the-conversation/aswb-exam-pass-rates-by-state-province/>)

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|--|------------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Masters Exam | Actual Data | | | Adjusted Data | | |
| Demographic | Group | # Test-Takers | Pass Rate | # Passed | # Passed (White Pass Rate) | Missing Social Workers |
| Race/Ethnicity | Asian | 1,582 | 81.5% | 1,289 | 1,487 | 198 |
| | Black | 5,936 | 64.4% | 3,823 | 5,580 | 1,757 |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 4,776 | 75.0% | 3,582 | 4,489 | 907 |
| | Multiracial | 780 | 89.0% | 694 | 733 | 39 |
| | Native American/Indigenous Peoples | 61 | 68.9% | 42 | 57 | 15 |
| | White | 17,837 | 94.0% | | | |
| Gender | Men | 4,696 | 83.3% | | | |
| | Women | 28,046 | 84.5% | | | |
| Age | 18-29 | 15,603 | 92.5% | | | |
| | 30-39 | 9,678 | 83.4% | | | |
| | 40-49 | 4,256 | 73.3% | | | |
| | 50 and older | 3,231 | 62.4% | | | |
| Language | English | 29,500 | 85.9% | | | |
| | Non-English | 3,268 | 70.1% | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Clinical Exam | Actual Data | | | Adjusted Data | | |
| Demographic | Group | # Test-Takers | Pass Rate | # Passed | # Passed (White Pass Rate) | Missing Social Workers |
| Race/Ethnicity | Asian | 534 | 89.7% | 479 | 504 | 25 |
| | Black | 1,423 | 69.5% | 989 | 1,342 | 353 |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 1,632 | 78.6% | 1,283 | 1,539 | 256 |
| | Multiracial | 265 | 90.9% | 241 | 250 | 9 |
| | Native American/Indigenous Peoples | 28 | 85.7% | 24 | 26 | 2 |
| | White | 9,496 | 94.3% | | | |
| Gender | Men | 2,058 | 88.3% | | | |
| | Women | 11,934 | 89.5% | | | |
| Age | 18-29 | 2,225 | 97.3% | | | |
| | 30-39 | 6,712 | 93.4% | | | |
| | 40-49 | 2,668 | 84.7% | | | |
| | 50 and older | 2,392 | 75.3% | | | |
| Language | English | 12,806 | 90.4% | | | |
| | Non-English | 1,191 | 77.7% | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | Missing Masters Social Workers (LMSW) | 2,917 |
| | | | | | Missing Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) | 643 |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | Total Missing Social Workers | 3,559 |

I have experienced significant challenges in passing the social work license exam—not due to a lack of understanding of the material, but because of the anxiety I face during testing. As an Afrolatina, I feel that the structure of this exam does not accommodate or support individuals like me, making it even more difficult to succeed.

I am at risk of losing my job as a school social worker because I have not yet obtained the required license, which is heartbreaking given my passion for this field. Every day, I work tirelessly to change the lives of our students and make a positive impact on the community. The work I do is not defined by a single exam, but by the lives I touch and the difference I make.

Social workers are essential, and the value of our work cannot be measured by a test that does not account for the diverse challenges faced by people like me. Please do not let a flawed testing system prevent dedicated, compassionate professionals from doing the vital work that is so needed in our communities.

Our work speaks louder than any exam.

I nearly died on June 9th, 2023.

A few bites into dinner on a balmy Friday evening I found myself choking to death. It happened so fast. Like a mousetrap snapping shut.

After several failed attempts at the Heimlich Maneuver by my wife Lauren, a house guest, myself, and a rather large police officer, I knew I was about to die. And so did Lauren. We locked eyes and exchanged our mutual understanding of that fact. I'll never forget that feeling. Wish I could. Lauren does too.

As I was contemplating how my imminent death was going to play out, it popped into my head that we had a LifeVac Choking Rescue Device in the house.

Lauren had seen one given as a gift at a baby shower the previous fall. She was impressed and decided to purchase one for us and each of our children's families. Lauren gave them as Christmas gifts. I remember thinking, at the time, that it wasn't much of a gift. Funny how wrong one can be.

Although we hadn't opened it and read the directions when we acquired it and it wasn't stored accessibly in the kitchen, Lauren knew exactly where it was.

I remember her tearing up the stairs to retrieve the device and almost immediately stomping back downstairs while calling out "I have to read the instructions"! I was busy trying not panic. And stay conscious.

Fortunately, the instructions were short and simple. Quickly, Lauren was coming at me with the device. On the second attempt, she cleared my airway enough for me to get some air.

If we hadn't had the LifeVac and Lauren not had the composure and courage to employ it successfully under the most desperate circumstances., I certainly would have died. And I would never had the chance to meet two of my grandsons who were born in the last 2 years.

I'm grateful for LifeVac and grateful to Lauren who showed such fierce courage under the most terrifying circumstances, and for my family.

Together they saved my life.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Xai Yance 11106

Address: [REDACTED] Astoria

I represent: social workers for justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: _____

Address: Khayla Feguer

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1175 Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Laura Russell

Address: The Legal Aid Society 200 S 12th St. Brooklyn

I represent: The Legal Aid Society 100151

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 8039

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Diana Ramos

Address: _____

I represent: Safety Net Activists

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stella Borwick

Address: 40 West 75th

I represent: SU45

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 362A6 Res. No. 362A6

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Socialwork
workforce
Alison D Jordan

Address: [REDACTED] St

I represent: myself Bayside

Address: see above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 362 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 06/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gabriela Amador Gius

Address: _____

I represent: social workers for justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 362 Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jacqueline MADROS

Address: _____

I represent: Social Workers for Justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 362-A

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELLEN MISCHINSKI

Address: 131 W 110th St New York, NY 10026

I represent: SOCIAL WORKERS FOR JUSTICE

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 362 Res. No. 362

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maria Lizardo

Address: 45 Wadsworth Ave NYC 10033

I represent: Social Workers for Justice

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 362

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 06/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maria Miranda

Address: 3 Edgewood Park

I represent: Social Workers For Justice

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 362A

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Freddie Downs-Ligon

Address: [REDACTED] White Star NYC 10032

I represent: Social workers for Justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 362 Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tara Escudero Alameda

Address: [REDACTED] Fer Rocker

I represent: Social Workers for Justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 362

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Luisa Lopez

Address: _____

I represent: Latino Social Work Coalition

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1175 Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Braunstein

Address: 7100 Broadway 10th floor NY NY

I represent: Her Justice

Address: [REDACTED] flk

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RATI EDA-YA THU-MANGALAM

Address: 100 William St, NY NY 10038

I represent: New York County Defender Services

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon John Sen

Address: _____

I represent: Self

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 06/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Berkman (NYLAG)

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Scott French

Address: _____

I represent: NYC HRA, Administrator

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 06-18-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Norm Cohen

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, NY 11201

I represent: VOCAL-NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 362-A

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shyvonne Noboa

Address: _____

I represent: Sunnyside Comm Svs.

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karla Aguilar

Address: [REDACTED] Astoria NY

I represent: Self

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alison Rosenthal

Address: [REDACTED] NY, NY 10024

I represent: West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alvin Michael

Address: [REDACTED] BK NY

I represent: Safety Net

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 362
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jonathan Chung

Address: 307 W. 38th St., 8th Fl. N.Y., NY 10018

I represent: National Alliance on Mental Illness of NYC

Address: _____

▶ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◀

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 791 Res. No. 1208
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alison Wilkey

Address: 129 Fulton St

I represent: Coalition for the Homeless

Address: _____

▶ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◀