

September 7, 2022

Stacey Hardy-Chandler, Ph.D., J.D., LCSW
Association of Social Work Boards
17126 Mountain Run Vista Ct.
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Dear Dr. Hardy-Chandler:

The release of basic demographic data by the Association of Social Work Boards on August 5, 2022, has caused quite a disturbance throughout the social work profession, and for good reason. It reveals what many have suspected and others have discerned through independent research at state and local levels: there are gross disparities in passage rates for African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and aging populations.

The release of 10-year historical data clearly demonstrates racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes particularly for Black and Latino test-takers. Having recognized disparate outcomes among graduates for years, social work education programs, as well as state organizations, repeatedly requested these data from ASWB to understand how they could better prepare students for licensure. This was not a recent request. NADD alone has pushed for these data for the last seven years. However, ASWB leadership consistently and vehemently contended it did not have any demographic data and thus, could not release demographic breakdowns of passage rates. Now, just preceding a change in leadership, ASWB released the data, declaring it as “doing the right thing.” Yet, to underscore, the release of data came about only because of a mounting groundswell of requests from individuals, scholars and social work organizations. How, then, do we dialogue, possibly partner, and engage with ASWB, an organization that has not operated in good faith?

Given U.S. historical accounts of biased testing and ASWB’s identity as a social work organization that pledges to uphold the values of the profession, it would have been appropriate for ASWB to share the data upon request and work closely with social work programs to create an equitable and fair licensing examination. Instead, ASWB continued to profit from racially-biased testing, amassing millions in financial assets from test-takers, especially persons from underrepresented racial and ethnic minoritized groups. Furthermore, communications from ASWB to state social work organizations and NADD revealed a pattern of defensiveness and a dismissive tone in rebuttal to inquiries about the licensing exam and requests for change in testing practices. Consequently, trust is at a minimum, and moving forward, from the perspective of NADD, ASWB must have greater transparency and repair the harm inflicted on many African American, Latino, and Native American test-takers.

NADD thoroughly understands ASWB’s legal rights to develop and administrate national licensure testing. However, legal bias has a longstanding practice within the United States, particularly in professional licensing. Nevertheless, what are ASWB’s ethical obligations to the social work profession and to social work education in the recruitment of diverse student bodies? It is problematic for social work education programs to continue to recruit a diverse student body, who will go into greater debt than

their White counterparts, knowing they are at a disadvantage on the licensure examination. Our value base means a clarion call for change.

In ASWB's published letter titled *Beyond Data: A Call to Action*, dated August 30, 2022, you acknowledge systemic and institutional racism as being "core to the racial disparities evidenced by the recently released licensing exam pass rate data." This call to action indicates a commitment to reform from racially-biased testing. However, there is also a need to repair the harm that past racially-biased testing has caused. Part of NADD's request is for even greater transparency on factors related to the social work licensing examination. This includes releasing the psychometric properties of the exam (or working with impartial psychometricians to conduct necessary analyses), providing detailed information on the constellation of theoretical approaches used in constructing the exam, and placing the exam in Spanish, similar to placing the exam in French as a provision of entering the Canadian market for social work licensing examinations.

It is against social work values and common sense thinking to knowingly perpetuate a test with known race and age-based biases. Knowledge of longstanding group disparities in licensure passage rates is at a tipping point, placing the social work profession in a moment of crisis. It is of paramount importance that ASWB engage in a long-needed self-examination of its alignment with social work values and commitment to the social work profession, including its aim to eliminate racism across its system of licensure testing. With all of the social and racial injustices that the country has faced in recent years, this is yet another stark injustice.

NADD recommends the following immediate actions:

- Immediately suspend all fees associated with test taking including fees for data request from academic units
- Identify and rebate fees paid to persons experiencing multiple test attempts, particularly to persons where the data demonstrate consistent bias
- Delay advancing the Interstate COMPACT, based on a uniform "standardized exam," until biased testing issues are addressed
- Meet with NADD representatives to discuss the report and develop collaborative actions, including options to conduct more in-depth data analyses on the exam itself

We acknowledge ASWB's release of the data and hope that the organization's new leadership will work collaboratively with the National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work.

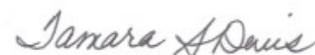
Sincerely,



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