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Martell Teasley, Ph.D., MSW

Sheryl Kubiak, Ph.D., MSW

Tamara S. Davis, Ph.D., SSW

National Association of Deans and Directors

Schools of Social Work

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Dear Dr. Teasley, Dr. Kubiak, and Dr. Davis:

Thank you for your letter of September 7, 2022, about the exam data that the Association of Social Work Boards released. This data release and subsequent call to action (<https://www.aswb.org/beyond-data-a-call-to-action/>) have and will continue to stimulate complex reactions and spark important discussions.

The recent data release involved years of contemplation, with leadership taking into consideration many issues, including the voluntary nature of the self-reported information. Immediately upon the approval of the Board of Directors on November 9, 2021, ASWB began a comprehensive analysis and released pass rate data upon completion and without delay. ASWB stands firm with government licensure, our member boards, and supporting programs and pledges to continue with the ethical and equitable development of assessment mechanisms as part of our short- and long-term initiatives.

ASWB is an organization that provides support and services to the social work regulatory community to advance safe, competent, and ethical practices to strengthen public protection. We remain firmly committed to our regulatory member boards and the entry-level competence assessments that aid them in promoting public protection. As demonstrated by this data release, we do so while confronting the systemic and societal issues that contribute to racial and other disparities. We intend to invite social work organizations to engage in collaborative, self-reflective analyses from the vantage point of our respective missions and roles. We seek to work together toward reasoned, solution-focused, upstream approaches.

The ASWB examinations are one of three major requirements for demonstrating professional competence. The others are education and experience—and all three matter. In line with its mission, ASWB adheres to robust industry standards as it develops, administers, scores, and continually updates its examinations. The involvement of almost 200 practicing social work volunteers and consultants in the development and implementation of the examinations is a testament to exam validity. The technical use of item response theory and differential item functioning analyses further buttresses the legal defensibility of the exams.

Because ASWB participates in only one of these core competency areas, we encourage all social work organizations across the professional spectrum to reflect on the disparate outcomes resulting from systemic and institutional issues within their areas of influence and engage in constructive dialogue relevant to their areas of impact. Broad societal issues cannot be solved by being compartmentalized. Demands that incite political and legal detractors

may ultimately have long-term, detrimental consequences for social work as a profession and for members of the public who receive social work services. The educational community can do much to help mitigate the disparities in exam outcomes by addressing the disparities and stark inconsistencies in the admissions, matriculation, and curriculum review processes to address the vital needs of candidate preparedness for licensure and practice.

To support fair and just regulation of licensing, ASWB is enhancing its regularly scheduled practice analysis to invite and include broader input from across the social work workforce. The expanded ASWB practice analysis survey, the Social Work Census, will provide added data that will guide an evolving understanding of the measurement of postgraduate, entry-level competence.

To help social work education programs, ASWB has eliminated fees for long existing school pass rate reports and has made the reports more comprehensive. ASWB continues to promote the use of these reports to help educational programs assess the readiness of their student bodies to sit for the postgraduate examinations. ASWB has also expanded the suite of exam resources that educators can now access—for free—to provide enhanced information about licensing and the examinations to their students and colleagues. Earlier versions of these reports and resources were sparingly used by the academic community. Educational organizations such as yours could help ensure that every social work program knows about and uses these free materials to increase candidate preparedness.

Moving forward, ASWB will continue to focus on its competence assessments and asks that the education community focus on program content that includes substantive social work practice and state-based government licensure. ASWB encourages the education community to embrace these enhanced resources and increased sharing of data. For example, rather than drop the use of examination performance as one outcome measurement in the accreditation process, embrace the use of the data as a means of accountability. Use the data to help address the relevant macro issues that have plagued historically marginalized populations—including issues that occur during the approximately six years most students spend in higher education settings.

ASWB looks forward to active and constructive critical thinking by the social work community. Members of the Social Work Workforce Coalition, established by ASWB, are asked to bring their organizational expertise and perspectives to these solution-focused efforts. ASWB is also scheduling community conversations to provide forums for practicing social workers and other stakeholders to offer insight on competency issues and other avenues for progress.

ASWB has taken action by compiling and releasing data that confirm the existing disparities and by proposing solutions that will be effective only in collaboration with education and practice entities. While we invite constructive conversations, we will not entertain recommendations that run counter to our mission of serving the regulatory community. This letter is intended to encourage collaborative relationships, acceptance, and understanding of organizational roles and to invite communication among members of the greater social work community. In addition, ASWB encourages increased transparency from the organizations that challenge the examination program so that the social work profession sees its way clearly and can work intentionally to reflect the very justice it promotes.

On behalf of the ASWB Board of Directors, we look forward to continual and ongoing communications as the social work community addresses these essential societal issues and needs.

Sincerely,



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President, ASWB Board of Directors



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