

House Higher Education Budget Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 2375
February 15, 2023

Chairman Howe and members of the Higher Education Budget Committee,

My name is David Fye, Executive Director for the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB). Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 2375, a bill that would create two new types of temporary licenses for applicants for permanent social work licensure under the BSRB. The language in HB 2375 is very similar to language included in HB 2340 and SB 176, identical bills requested on behalf of the Board of the BSRB. When I testified in front of the Budget Committee on the budget for the BSRB, I provided background on the issue addressed in HB 2375, concerning social applicants from programs seeking accreditation from the national accrediting body.

For the social work profession, the BSRB requires that students receive their education from programs that meet certain standards. If applicants received their education from programs accredited by the national accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the BSRB is able to expedite their license applications. However, if applicants did not receive their education from programs accredited by CSWE, then those applicants must have received their education from a program that meets alternative requirements in the licensing regulations for the profession. For many years, these regulations have required that applicants from non-accredited programs must have received half of their education while in face-to-face contact with core faculty at the physical location of the education institution.

The CSWE accreditation process can take 3 to 3 and a half years to complete, so newly created programs would have some individuals graduate from those programs prior to the programs reaching accreditation. If a program reaches accreditation, CSWE will backdate the date of the program's accreditation to the date they entered candidacy, however the issue is how licensing bodies should process these applicants during the time that their programs are in "candidacy" for accreditation.

The issue for new online programs is that the accreditation process with CSWE takes about 3 years to 3 and a half years to complete. Therefore, for new schools that are seeking accreditation, they will begin accepting students and those students may graduate from that program prior to the program reaching accreditation. If those applicants apply for licensure from the BSRB, since they received their education from a program that is not accredited by CSWE, they will need to have received their education from a program that met the alternate requirements for licensure. If those programs are online-only programs, then they would be unable to meet those requirements, under the existing statutes and regulation on this issue.

CSWE utilizes steps to accreditation that include (1) Pre-Candidacy, (2) Candidacy, and (3) Accreditation. Pre-Candidacy means that a program has submitted an application and other materials and is in communication with CSWE seeking to be accepted into the accreditation phase known as "Candidacy." Once a school is accepted into "Candidacy," CSWE performs onsite inspections and provides the program with annual reports indicating whether the program is on track to reach accreditation. If the program reaches accreditation, CSWE will backdate their accreditation date to when the program was accepted into "Candidacy." However, for the BSRB's licensing purposes, the issue is what should be done for these students when they graduate from a program that is in "Candidacy" for accreditation.

Four Advisory Committees for the BSRB (the Social Work Advisory Committee, Professional Counseling Advisory Committee, Addiction Counseling Advisory Committee, and Marriage and Family Therapy Advisory Committee) recommended to the Board removing the physical presence requirement and allowing for the face-to-face component to be satisfied either in person or by screen for their professions educational regulations and the Board voted to support that recommendation, so that change is working its way through the regulation change process.

Second, the BSRB researched methods used by other states to resolve the issue of students graduating from programs that are in “Candidacy” for accreditation. The Board recommended adopting a model similar to one used by the Minnesota Board of Social Work, which grants a temporary license to applicants from programs that are in “Candidacy” for accreditation. Once their program reaches accreditation, they can request a permanent license. If their program does not become accredited, then they would no longer be able to use the temporary license. This new language creating this Temporary Candidacy License is included in HB 2375 (as well as HB 2340 and SB 176).

HB 2375 includes specific language to clarify that these two new types of Temporary Candidacy Licenses would be available for applicants from both in-person programs and online-only programs.

I believe the changes in HB 2375 are consistent with recommendations by the Board to the statutes and regulations for the social work profession, and these changes will address workforce concerns while not endangering the public protection mission of the Board.

I would be happy to stand for any questions as the appropriate time.