

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

**TESTIMONY ON 25-S 266,
RELATING TO LICENSE PROCEDURE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS
March 6, 2025**

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports this legislation which would eliminate the requirement that an applicant for a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) pass a standardized written test in order to qualify for the license. It is important to note at the outset that this testing requirement would still apply to licensed independent clinical social workers (LICSW). This bill follows a law enacted in 2022, which eliminated this testing requirement for three years. By all accounts, it has had a salutary effect on increasing diversity in the profession without in any way diminishing the quality of services provided by these licensees.

The ACLU has long been concerned about the use of standardized written licensing tests and the way they often serve as unwarranted barriers to occupational licenses. They usually do not demonstrate any relationship to one's capability on the job, while often having a racially discriminatory impact that depresses the number of students of color entering important professions.

This is not the first time the General Assembly has recognized and addressed the discriminatory impact of licensing tests. Over thirty years ago, the legislature had concerns about a standardized test for the teaching profession that similarly had a devastating impact on applicants of color. At the time, legislators passed a law barring the state from denying certification to teachers solely on the basis of their test score. Until it was repealed more than a decade later due to federal mandates in the now-extinct No Child Left Behind Act, the law served its purpose. While it was in operation, it allowed for the certification of many Black and Latinx teachers who had previously been denied a certificate based on their test scores. It also had a very positive psychological effect in encouraging more students of color to participate in teacher prep programs, since the discriminatory impact of the test was well known at the time.

In order to continue to promote diversity in the social work profession without in any way affecting quality, the ACLU urges support of this bill.