



Regulation

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# New survey shows overwhelming support for preserving social work examination as part of licensing requirements

Tags: Exams Regulation

A groundbreaking survey conducted by the American Foundation for Research and Consumer Education in Social Work Regulation reveals the vast majority of social workers (76%) believe that the licensing examination is crucial in maintaining high professional standards. In addition, 96% of social workers are in favor of a proposed multi-state compact that will allow tested and licensed social workers to practice in all states that have adopted the compact.

The social work licensing examination is one part of an overall system that educates, prepares, tests entry-to-practice competence, licenses, and regulates the social work profession. The exam serves as the only uniform, objective measure of social work knowledge and skills. Similar to other professions, including doctors, nurses, lawyers, and teachers, social work uses testing as a standard practice to ensure practitioners demonstrate the baseline competence and knowledge necessary to deliver professional services to client populations.

## Key Survey Findings:

- **Upholding Standards Through Examinations:** A majority of social workers (76%) believes that the licensing exam is crucial in maintaining high professional standards, and 67% agree that the exam is a vital measure of competence.
- **Endorsement of Licensing Exam Requirements:** With 78% of respondents advocating for

the necessity of the licensing exam for new professionals, the community clearly recognizes the need to maintain rigorous entry standards. Approximately 73% of social workers consider it a mistake to remove the exam requirement, reflecting a strong commitment to the exam as a necessary licensing component.

- **Views on Licensing Pathways:** An even larger majority (82%) rejects the notion of granting licenses merely based on educational credentials, underscoring the value placed on standardized assessments.
- **Strong Support for Licensing Exam among People of Color:** A large majority (75%) of social workers who identify as people of color believes the exam is important and should be required. In addition, 82% agree that new social workers should be required to take the exam to become licensed.
- **Near Unanimous Support for the Multi-State License Compact:** Overall support for the multi-state compact is 96%, with consistent support across all demographic groups.

Due to recent policy debates about the impact and importance of the testing requirement for a social work license and about the social work compact, the Foundation conducted this research in order to hear firsthand from the social workers who are on the front lines serving our most vulnerable communities.

The survey of 510 social workers nationwide was conducted between March 28 and April 3, 2024. The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is +/- 4.3%.

The American Foundation for Research and Consumer Education in Social Work Regulation is the research arm of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). Working with a team of practicing social workers serving as committee members, item writers, consultants, and form reviewers, ASWB oversees the exam development process.