

Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Strategy to Address Social Work Practice Mobility

Please note: The use of the terms “state” and “board” are intended to be inclusive of all ASWB membership regulatory organizations, including states, commonwealths, districts, territories, and provinces. Similarly, the use of the term “license” is intended to refer to the state-issued credential authorizing the applicant to practice the profession and is meant to be inclusive of licensure, certification, registration, and other similar terms. States will continue to use their own terminology when describing the practitioners, the various credentials, nomenclature, and acronyms.

OVERVIEW

The qualifications for and application and receipt of state-issued licenses is under heightened scrutiny. Differing qualifications for licensure, differing categories of licensure, and differing scopes of practice fuel these debates. This additional scrutiny is largely premised upon increased interstate physical movement of practitioners and technological advancements that facilitate virtual practice of social work without physical presence.

Social work practice mobility refers to the physical and virtual mobility of social workers who elect to practice in multiple jurisdictions. The Mobility Strategy aspires to depoliticize the process, maintain regulatory expertise, and implement a commonsense approach to addressing social work practice mobility.

PURPOSE

Efficient licensure eligibility decisions increase state board effectiveness and benefit the member boards, licensees, and the consuming public. To lawfully practice, social workers must be authorized to practice by obtaining a license issued by each state where they practice. ASWB’s Mobility Strategy recognizes states’ rights and honors member boards’ overarching public protection mission.

The ASWB Mobility Strategy is premised on a concerted effort by member boards to harmonize licensure eligibility criteria across all ASWB member boards so that equivalently licensed social workers can obtain licenses necessary to lawfully practice in other jurisdictions. The Mobility Strategy provides a process and resources through which member boards can quickly evaluate and determine eligibility when a licensed social worker seeks equivalent licensure in an additional jurisdiction.

Standards, as agreed upon by ASWB members and defined below, clarify social work licensure categories and criteria across jurisdictions. Further, a centralized databank will provide member boards with verified primary source information to make decisions about equivalency, including supervision.

PROCESS

License equivalency will be determined by applying the Standards for the mobility licensing process. The Standards increase consistency across jurisdictions and are outlined in the ASWB Model Social Work Practice Act (model act). ***The jurisdictional board retains the statutory authority and responsibility to grant the initial license. When a licensed social worker seeks additional licenses, each board determines eligibility.***

Member boards are not expected to change current license titles and acronyms.

Member jurisdictions may require additional criteria for licensure such as background checks, jurisprudence exams, or additional supervision.

STANDARDS

The following Standards represent the core of the Mobility Strategy. It is anticipated that these Standards can be implemented administratively without the need for legislative, regulatory, and/or rule changes.

- a. Three categories of license (from the ASWB Model Social Work Practice Act)
 - Licensed Baccalaureate Social Worker (LBSW)
 - Licensed Master’s Social Worker (LMSW)
 - Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)
- b. Four minimum essential criteria
 - Graduation from an accredited social work program
 - A passing score on the appropriate ASWB exam
 - Completion of supervised experience (as required by license)
 - No disciplinary action

RESOURCES

Consistent with the mission to lessen burdens of member boards, ASWB provides resources that support member boards’ Mobility efforts, including legally defensible, reliable, and valid exams, the model law, the Public Protection Database (PPD), application processing services, the Social Work Registry, the Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program, and continuing education audit services. In addition, the Model Regulatory Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice publication is available to support the regulation of electronic practice.

ASWB is developing and populating a centralized, secure databank that can provide member boards with access to verified primary source documentation for social workers seeking equivalent licensure in additional jurisdictions. Current candidate and licensee data contained in the ASWB Social Work Registry will be integrated into the databank.

Optimal use of the databank is based on the following principles:

1. Member board recognition that currently licensed applicants have been vetted and duly licensed by another board of social work.
2. Member board recognition of the information in the databank as primary source and verified.

The databank will serve as a permanent and secure repository of primary source records, including:

- Educational transcript(s)
- Exam scores
- Verified supervision hours
- Continuing education documentation
- Licensure applications
- State-issued license(s)

Upon the social worker’s request, ASWB will share databank materials with identified member board(s). ASWB staff will also verify the status of all social work licenses held, query the ASWB Public Protection Database (PPD), and perform other checks as required.

Social workers will have multiple opportunities to enroll in the databank:

- as a social work student
- when registering with ASWB to take the licensing exam
- when applying for licensure or renewing with the member board(s)
- at any time as a social work professional

The ASWB Board of Directors endorses the ASWB Strategy to Address Social Work Practice Mobility developed by the Mobility Task Force.