



UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH
CONNECTICUT

Testimony Presented to the Public Health Committee

In favor of SB 124

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February 28, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you this morning to support SB 124 which will allow graduates of MSW Programs that are in the candidacy stage of the accreditation process to apply for licensure at the LMSW level.

The University of Saint Joseph Master's in Social Work (MSW) program is in the process of applying for accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Having received continuous CSWE accreditation of our Baccalaureate Social Work Program since 1974 we have the knowledge and resources to move the MSW Program through the accreditation process successfully.

I would like to review CSWE accreditation so that the Committee is aware of the rigorous process of program review necessary to be approved for Candidacy. Programs reaching this stage have had to demonstrate compliance with fundamental standards of accreditation.

The initial step in Program Accreditation is to apply for **State licensure** of the program. The University can apply for CSWE accreditation only after the program is licensed by the state in which it operates. After a rigorous review and site visit, The State Board of Education granted program licensure on June 26, 2013.

CSWE accreditation is a minimum three-year process. The agency uses a benchmark system for reviewing programs. The benchmark model is a systematic, incremental approach to developing a social work program and writing a comprehensive self-study. There are three benchmarks; the first portion of each benchmark consists of specific accreditation standards the program must be in compliance with and the second portion consists of standards that must be addressed in draft form.

Program development is guided by three visits from CSWE commissioners. During each visit the commissioner makes a recommendation regarding the program's compliance with standards in

the first portion of the benchmark and provides consultation on the standards in the second portion.

Programs progress through several stages of program development: applying for candidacy status, completing candidacy, and receiving initial accreditation status.

Pre-candidacy status is given to a program that has not yet enrolled students, and authorizes the University to admit its first class. In order to receive this approval, the program must submit extensive documentation of its curriculum design, policies, administration and the allocation of resources to support the program. When the program demonstrates full compliance, it is allowed to move forward with enrolling students.

Candidacy status is reached when the program is reviewed by the Commission and is determined to be meeting all relevant standards. This status is granted after submission of *Benchmark I* documents and a site visit by a Commissioner from the Committee on Accreditation. Each year, the program is reviewed and Candidacy Status is continued. The university must have hired a minimum of five faculty dedicated to the MSW Program by this time.

By CSWE Standards, Students admitted into the MSW program while a program is in candidacy, retroactively are considered to have graduated from a CSWE-accredited program.

Full Accreditation is achieved after the first class of students is graduated and the program demonstrates compliance with all standards through submission of a complete self-study, and provides outcome assessment data to support the effectiveness of the program.

The CSWE Accreditation thus is a developmental model where the organization supports prospective programs and mentors them through the accreditation process. It is our understanding that all programs that have achieved Candidacy Status from CSWE have successfully moved through to full accreditation. It is a rigorous process but one designed to ensure programs are successful in meeting all relevant standards so they are producing graduates who have demonstrated essential practice competencies.

Dr. Stanley Battle, Director of the MSW Program will provide testimony about the focus of the USJ Program and the beneficial impact of this change on early program graduates, consumers, and the State of Connecticut as a result of having a prepared and professional workforce.



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Stanley Battle, MSW, MPH, PhD
Director, MSW Program
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The USJ MSW Program expects to complete initial requirements to achieve Candidacy Status at the CSWE Committee on Accreditation Meeting in October, 2014. Since CSWE has determined that programs in candidacy status have met sufficient criteria to justify recognition of graduates as having a degree from an accredited program, it is fair and proper to include graduates of programs in the candidacy stage when determining eligibility for licensure.

We calculate that as many as 60 students will graduate from our program prior to the earliest date we can achieve accreditation, October, 2016.

My colleague Professor Madden spoke about the accreditation process but I would like to speak briefly about the USJ MSW Program so that you are made aware of how the program is responding to workforce development needs in the state. We believe that a delay in moving our graduates into the workforce will be harmful to the people who need community-based clinical social work services. It would restrict the opportunities for our graduates to assume employment in the sectors they are being prepared for.

After extensive research, the MSW Program was designed to address emerging needs in the community. We have established partnerships with community agencies that provide critical services to these populations. They are excited that we are preparing a workforce ready to assume the emerging roles in direct practice.

- Recent developments in health care including passage of the Affordable Care Act and policy initiatives to help people who have illnesses and disabilities to remain in their own homes and neighborhoods will create the need for well-trained social workers skilled in clinical diagnosis and case management.
- Returning veterans face challenges reintegrating into their families, their communities, and their life outside of the military. Many have experienced trauma and are facing rehabilitation from significant injuries. Social workers have been primary providers for the VA and the need for more specially trained clinicians will grow over the next few years.

- Mental health services located within communities, accessible and relevant to families are urgently needed to reach those whose symptoms too often go untreated and can lead to public tragedies.
- Services to children and families continue to be an ongoing need in our communities. DCF and other organizations need clinicians prepared to implement evidence-based practices in community settings.

The current law was not written at a time when any new MSW programs were being proposed. Other states have language that recognizes the degree of graduates from programs in candidacy, (e.g. New Jersey, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, & Utah) so this proposal is not outside of mainstream thinking. The parties most harmed if the current law stays in effect are graduates. Delaying eligibility for our graduates to be licensed does not advance consumer protection in any substantive manner and would be an impediment to agencies seeking to fill positions for community-based clinical social workers.

The Council on Social Work Education has established the standards for ensuring students have achieved a level of competency in each of the areas of social work practice, a standard all programs in Candidacy must achieve. The curriculum has been designed, the faculty hired, the students are applying, and their anticipation of entering exciting fields of practice is growing. I urge your support to ensure they can become eligible for licensure at the LMSW level upon graduation.

Thank you and we would be happy to respond to any questions.