

Questions for the ASWB Special Accommodation Unit from Members of the Workgroup on Social Worker Requirements for Licensure

- 1) Access Equity & Awareness
 - a) What strategies does ASWB use to ensure that all exam candidates—especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds—are aware of their right to request accommodations?
 - b) How do you address gaps in awareness due to language barriers, digital access limitations, or institutional mistrust?
- 2) Demographic Data on Accommodations
 - a) Does ASWB collect and disaggregate data on who is requesting accommodations (by race, language, disability status, etc.) and who is approved?
 - b) If so, will ASWB share this data to help the Workgroup evaluate if disparities exist in accommodation access or approval rates?
- 3) Cultural Responsiveness in the Accommodations Process
 - a) What training or review protocols are in place to ensure the accommodations team approaches requests with cultural humility and an understanding of racialized, linguistic, or trauma-informed needs?
- 4) Timeliness and Appeals
 - a) What is the average turnaround time for accommodation requests?
 - b) Does ASWB track delays or denials that prevent candidates from testing on their preferred timeline?
 - c) What formal appeals or feedback mechanisms are available, and how are those outcomes tracked?
- 5) Barrier Identification & Reform
 - a) What common barriers has the Special Arrangements Team identified in the documentation or approval process?
 - b) Has the team recommended any policy changes to reduce unnecessary burdens on candidates, especially first-generation test-takers or those without healthcare access to document their needs?
- 6) Use of Accommodations and Exam Outcomes
 - a) Has ASWB conducted any research on how accommodations correlate with pass rates, especially for BIPOC, deaf/hard-of-hearing, and neurodivergent candidates?
 - b) How does the team use this data to inform improvement or outreach efforts?
- 7) Language Access and Interpretation Equity
 - a) Are accommodations consistently granted for test-takers whose first language is not English?
 - b) How does ASWB evaluate and support language-based accommodations beyond what's required under ADA?

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8) Eligibility to get Accommodations

- a) What is the composition of the entity that sets policy and reviews accommodation requests?
- b) Are individuals with a range of disabilities included within this entity or collaborated with on a consultancy basis?
- c) Why are candidates with permanent disabilities required to submit the same information each time they request (the same) accommodations?

9) Equality of the Process for Booking ASWB Exam

- a) Why are deaf candidates required to call to schedule their examination instead of emailing? *This seems counterintuitive. From my personal experience (Dr. Pucci), this takes up to 1 month to have this set up through phone calls and call backs while people without needing accommodations can easily schedule their exam date online on the same day.*
- b) Why are test takers with disabilities given the SAME timeline to take their exam as other test takers without disabilities required to get their doctors' documentation to confirm their disability?
- c) This would take time to get a doctor to fill out the form and send it to ASWB to get approval.

10) Qualifications and Selection of Sign Language Interpreters

- a) How are interpreters selected and hired?
- b) Do you have staff with the requisite expertise to oversee this process?
- c) Are the interpreters you hire experienced with and specifically qualified to interpret standardized tests?
- d) How do you determine if they have the requisite professional and content knowledge to render accurate translations?
- e) Are you familiar with the differences between interpretation and translation?
- f) What knowledge do you have regarding this process with respect to providing access to examinations and with respect to American Sign Language and English?
- g) What preparation materials, including the opportunity to review test questions in advance, are provided for interpreters so that they can render accurate translations?

11) ASWB Research Related to Test Takers with Disabilities

- a) What data is routinely collected from candidates with disabilities to learn about their experiences with ASWB's process for requesting and obtaining accommodations?
- b) What research has ASWB done related to testing people with disabilities? How do you collect and disaggregate test score data on candidates with specific disabilities?

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- c) Have you reached out to various populations to learn about their testing experiences with respect to process, format, and content? Surveys? Focus groups?

Accurate information about the ASWB and the social work licensing exams

prepared for the Maryland Workgroup on Social Work Licensure Requirements
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ASWB and support for social work boards

The Association of Social Work Boards exists to support its member boards. We strive to keep our members informed through our website, our biweekly newsletter, Association Update, and the quarterly newsletter, Social Work Scope. ASWB periodically hosts online sessions with member board administrators and members, hosts two major meetings per year that include daylong sessions for board administrators, and attends member board meetings upon request. New board members may attend ASWB's signature training event, New Board Member Training, fully funded by the association.

In addition, ASWB recently added a staff position, Member Outreach Program Coordinator, to our Volunteer Engagement and Outreach department. This staff member is charged with providing individualized engagement with members.

Our staff are trained to answer questions from candidates, and we encourage the Maryland board to take advantage of the expertise of our customer service representatives by referring candidate questions directly to [ASWB](#).

Candidate services

ASWB provides candidates with multiple avenues for candidate services, including requesting arrangements via ASWB Central or printable forms. ASWB staffs a full-service call center that has access to nonstandard testing arrangements staff member via phone and email.

The special arrangements team has doubled in size to meet a significant increase in volume to ensure that candidates receive the best customer service and timely responses. Nonstandard testing arrangement staff support candidates by answering emails, communicating with candidates by phone, and processing requests for nonstandard testing arrangements.

ASWB has Spanish-speaking staff members in both its Candidate Services Center and in the nonstandard testing arrangements department. All ASWB staff receive training in practices that support inclusive candidate experiences.

Nonstandard testing arrangements policy and practice

ASWB staff, in collaboration with consultants and legal counsel, sets policy and practice for the organization. ASWB routinely consults with individuals and groups representing the disability population. Any substantive policies are approved by ASWB's elected Board of Directors, which represents member regulatory boards in the United States and Canada.

Approving and scheduling nonstandard testing arrangements

Exam candidates must request and receive approval for nonstandard testing arrangements before registering for and scheduling their exam. To minimize delays, candidates are encouraged to request arrangements at the same time as they are applying for a license with their board.

ASWB rarely denies approval because staff members work one on one with candidates to obtain the appropriate documentation to move forward. If a candidate does not have required documentation, ASWB will request and accept alternative supporting documentation, such as Disability Resource Center letters or practitioner letters. It takes up to three weeks for approval after all materials are received. ASWB recently added tiered accommodation approvals which will allow permanent disability arrangements to be approved for three years.

In all cases, the approval period begins only after the candidate registers for an exam. Pearson VUE currently requires a scheduling specialist to schedule a testing appointment for test-takers with nonstandard testing arrangements. ASWB is exploring alternatives with Pearson VUE to implement a scheduling process via email.

While there is no formal appeals process, escalations are reviewed by the manager and director to come to a fair resolution.

Practice test

ASWB offers an online practice test designed to help candidates prepare to take the test. The practice test is not intended to supply the knowledge needed to pass the examinations; rather it gives candidates a preview of the phrasing and structure of the questions and an approximation of the test-delivery experience.

The current version of the online practice test does not include the scheduled break. An updated practice test is being developed.

Testing appointment availability

The social work licensing exams may be scheduled at 400 Pearson VUE test centers. Because Pearson VUE test centers tend to be larger and more strategically located, availability is similar to what it was with PSI. ASWB works closely with Pearson VUE and its capacity team by continuously monitoring test center availability to ensure that candidates are able to schedule appointments. Pearson VUE has the ability to respond to test center capacity concerns. ASWB welcomes inquiries from test-takers who need assistance with scheduling a testing appointment.

Break policy

In the regular course of evaluating the development and administration of the social work licensing exams, the Association of Social Work Boards works closely with psychometric experts to determine ways in which the association can improve the test-taking experience.

Recently, coinciding with the vendor transition for exam administration, ASWB implemented a policy that provides the social work licensing exams in two distinct sections of 85 questions with a break in between the two sections. Each section has a time limit of two hours, and there are no structural differences in content distribution, content order, or difficulty between the sections. Under this policy, the exams continue to meet and exceed industry standards related to the validity and reliability necessary for their use in the licensure process.

The purpose of this modification is to provide test-takers with a break during which the testing clock is stopped for a period of up to 10 minutes. This modified format is based on test-taker feedback as well as analyses conducted by ASWB and psychometric experts at Pearson VUE.

With the implementation of this policy, the exam process is as follows. After completing the first 85-question section, test-takers are prompted to review and submit answers for that section. Upon submission, a test-taker's answers for that section are recorded and can no longer be reviewed or changed. The testing clock then stops for up to 10 minutes. After the break, test-takers have two hours to complete the remaining 85 questions. This testing policy applies to all social work licensing exams.

The scheduled break stops the testing clock and allows test-takers to pause before continuing to the second section. They may also end the break early if they prefer to begin answering the second set of questions immediately. Test-takers may also take additional unscheduled breaks during their exam after notifying the testing proctor; the testing clock, however, does not stop during unscheduled breaks.

ASWB and its psychometric experts at Pearson VUE conducted an analysis using exam data before implementing the scheduled break. Through its evaluation, Pearson VUE found that candidates would continue to have sufficient time to complete each section within the allotted time, consistent with the previous exam format.

Given the lack of substantive structural changes and the absence of time constraint issues, the scheduled break is expected to enhance both the experience of candidates taking the social work licensing exams and the fairness of these assessments, as all candidates are eligible for the break if needed. The addition of the scheduled break also has the potential to reduce the number of test-takers requiring approval for nonstandard testing arrangements.

Consistent with regulatory associations for other licensed professions, ASWB continuously evaluates its exam administration policies and practices to improve the test-taking experience and maintain the exam's validity for use by the social work regulatory community in Canada and the United States.

For more information on taking the exam, including details about both scheduled and unscheduled breaks, download the [ASWB Examination Guidebook](#).

90-day waiver

ASWB policy states that candidates must wait 90 days between exam attempts. This waiting period exists to increase exam security by preventing overexposure of exam content. It also benefits test-takers because it sets aside time to prepare for the next attempt. The exams' high level of reliability means that retaking an exam without improving social work knowledge leads to similar results and higher expenses for candidates.

Test-takers may request a waiver that allows them to retake the exam before the end of the 90-day period if they meet the following criteria:

- The state or provincial board where they are applying for a license allows waivers.
- The most recent exam score was within 10 correct answers of the passing score.

Data on accommodations

ASWB collects demographic data on all candidates for use in research such as the 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis and the exam report series by Dr. Joy Kim, *Pass Rates in Context*. These publications included analyses of pass rate data disaggregated according to race/ethnicity, language, age, and gender. ASWB continues to explore future research questions, including analyzing pass rates for individuals receiving nonstandard testing arrangements.

Listening and learning

ASWB has actively listened to the community and gathered input. We are taking actions to enhance our exam development process by including additional voices.

From January to May 2023, ASWB conducted its [Community Conversations](#) program, a series of facilitated conversations with social workers about their unique experiences with the licensing exams. Each session centered around the test-taker experiences of exam preparation, administration, and outcomes.

Initiatives that align with the research findings include:

- Increasing the diversity of representation among exam question writers, Examination Committee members, and [Practice Analysis Task Force members](#)
- [Providing education to the public about the item development process](#) and the ways that ASWB guards against bias
- Developing [new free resources for educators](#) and making the *ASWB Examination Guidebook* for candidates available as a free download
- Committing to making the [exams more accessible](#) by piloting a remote exam administration option to increase exam access
- Launching the [Social Work Census](#) in March 2024 to include as many voices as possible in the exam development process for the next iteration of the competence assessment

About Marette Monson

Marette Monson, MBA, LCSW, was elected by the body of regulators from each jurisdiction to a position on the ASWB Nominating Committee. That position was a two-year commitment that ended in November 2024. She is a binational disability advocate who has worked with ASWB to consult on its accommodations processes.

Ms. Monson met with the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners in June and described personal experiences and conversations she has had in Utah with employers, members of the public, and other social workers as she has been working in the field since Utah passed its alternative pathway.

On the topic of how alternative pathways reduce options for disabled individuals, Marette says that choices do not exist unless a person has the ability to actually obtain the choice. She adds, "If you are saying that people are unable to pass the exam because of a biological difference that is unchanging, such as a learning disability, then they don't have a choice to take the exam and pass it, even if they wanted to, and would be forced to take an alternative pathway that is inferior and segregated with unequal benefits unless they were provided with the help they needed to pass. Individuals with disabilities are often not given that help when alternative pathways exist, therefore, they will be limited in their choices and will not have the choice to pass the exam. This is why alternative pathways are illegal according to the Americans with Disabilities Act and are considered segregation. In June of 2024, the US Department of Justice issued an intent to sue the State of Utah for creating alternative pathways in employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities because doing so is a violation of the ADA. They are currently still working out a settlement."

One example of how individuals with disabilities might not receive the help they need is in the education process, Ms. Monson says. Instead, educators might simply allow them to demonstrate a lower level of knowledge, mistakenly conflating such practice with true accommodation.

When speaking with the Maryland Workgroup, Marette cited the following research from the National Institute of Health. This includes the references for their research from the CDC.

[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10357509/#:~:text=Introduction,care%20\(3%E2%80%9335\).](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10357509/#:~:text=Introduction,care%20(3%E2%80%9335).)

"Recent estimates indicate that 26% of US adults experience disability (1), with higher rates of disabilities in Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities. For example, compared to 26.6% of white persons with disabilities (PwD) ages 45–64, 35.5% of Black and Hispanic adults in that same age group are living with a disability in the US (2). Moreover, research shows that both BIPOC and disability communities experience

disparities in the receipt of equitable care (3–5). For example, each report unmet needs for healthcare at disproportionately higher levels than their white, non-Hispanic and non-disabled counterparts, respectively (2, 6, 7). Both groups face insurance, cost, and provider-patient communication barriers to high-quality care and problems receiving culturally appropriate care."