

February 16, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall
House Health Committee
House Office Building, 6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the House Health Committee:

I am a community scholar who participated in public testimony and comment during the Maryland Workgroup for Social Worker Licensure Requirements. My specialization is anti-oppressive workforce development for social work students and emerging practitioners, including unpaid internships, unfair licensing examinations, and paywalls to textbooks and academic journals.

For the past four years, I researched the Association of Social Work Boards and published numerous journal articles on the topic, including:

DeCarlo, M. P. & Nienow, M. (2025). Uniquely Biased: How ASWB Exams Violate Psychometric Best Practices. *Advances in Social Work*, 25(2), 495-514.
<https://doi.org/10.18060/28573>

DeCarlo, M. P. & Nienow, M. (2025). In Pursuit of the Status Quo: ASWB's Research, Grantmaking, and Regulatory Practices. *Advances in Social Work*, 25(2), 515-532.
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DeCarlo, M. P., & Bean, G. J. (2024). Assessing Measurement Invariance in ASWB Exams: Regulatory Research Proposal to Advance Equity. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work* 21(2), 214–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26408066.2024.2308814> (preprint)

Hirsch, J., **DeCarlo, M. P.**, Lewis, A. & Walker, C. (2024) Alternative pathways to social work licensure: An integrative review and social equity policy analysis. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work* 21(2), 177–198.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/26408066.2023.2284919> (preprint)

DeCarlo, M. P., Bean, J., & Nugent, W. (2023). *Assessing Differential Test Functioning in ASWB Exams: A Regulatory Research Proposal*.
Unsuccessful grant (\$0 requested). ASWB did not provide access to test function data.

At heart, I am a social work research methods educator and textbook author, so in my brief testimony today, I would like to help you more deeply understand how ASWB examinations violate testing standards.

In 2023, I partnered with two esteemed social work psychometricians to conduct a differential test functioning (i.e., measurement invariance) study of ASWB exams along the linguistic, age, and racial biases revealed in ASWB's 2022 exam equity report. ASWB rejected data sharing with our zero cost and open source project. Our project aimed to bring ASWB into compliance with the test standards required by the AERA, APA, and NCME (2014). They require ASWB to perform many more psychometric tests during validation than they presently perform.

Most importantly, the precision of the exam's cut score must be evaluated using the conditional standard error of measurement. This is a required test ASWB does not perform. Standard 2.14 clearly states: "Where cut scores are specified for selection or classification, the standard errors of measurement should be reported in the vicinity of each cut score." Standard 2.16 reinforces this standard for licensing exams by stating: "When a test score or composite score is used to make classification decisions (e.g., pass/fail, achievement levels), the standard error of measurement at or near the cut scores has important implications for the trustworthiness of these decisions."

In layman's terms, the conditional standard error of measurement allows us to see how precise the examination is for test-takers of different true abilities. You want an examination that is good at determining whether a middling social worker is safe or not. An examination that was most precise for exceptionally good or bad social workers would be a poor fit for licensing examinations. Because boards make licensure decisions based on a single point off of a cut score, the precision at the cut score is the most valuable. ASWB does not conduct this required test.

This is standard psychometric reporting in the policy context. The conditional standard error of measurement is available for K-12 state aptitude tests (e.g., New Jersey Department of Education, 2023; Pearson, n.d.; Vanderford, 2024), Praxis examinations for teacher licensure (e.g., Educational Testing Service, n.d., 2022, 2024), college entrance exams for undergraduates (Steedle et al., 2020) and graduate students (Educational Testing Service, 2025), NCLEX exams for nursing licensure (Assessment Technologies Institute, 2020), and other professions.

ASWB rejected my team from investigating the conditional standard error of measurement. In March 2025, ASWB stated to the Virginia Board of Social Work that they performed this test, but when the board asked for the data and procedure citing the testing standards, ASWB stonewalled. A hearing is scheduled in three weeks in Henrico.

Precision and fairness are deeply interrelated.

Standard 2.15: When there is credible evidence for expecting that conditional standard errors of measurement or test information functions will differ substantially for various subgroups, investigation of the extent and impact of such differences should be undertaken and reported as soon as is feasible.

Comment: If differences are found, they should be clearly indicated in the appropriate documentation. In addition, if substantial differences do exist, the test content and scoring models should be examined to see if there are legally acceptable alternatives that do not result in such differences.

Psychometricians have gone through painstaking effort to specify the exact tests necessary to avoid this policy problem. ASWB ignores them. They stonewall community researchers offering to do it for free, and misinform all stakeholders about what psychometric standards require.

These are two standards out of a dozen that ASWB violates. A more complete list is provided in my written testimony.

ASWB holds \$51 million dollars in the bank, operates at a 17% annual profit margin, and exploits their position as both test publisher and test purchaser. Pathways to licensure like those afforded by HB0769, are necessary because ASWB exams are psychometrically invalid, inadequately documented, and legally indefensible.

-Matt DeCarlo, PhD MSW. opensocialwork.org mdecarlo@sju.edu

What do testing standards require?

What is required?	Quotations from Relevant Testing Standards	ASWB Exam Program Compliance
The conditional standard error of measurement in the vicinity of the cut score.	<p>Standard 2.14: Where cut scores are specified for selection or classification, the standard errors of measurement should be reported in the vicinity of each cut score.</p> <p>Standard 2.16: When a test score or composite score is used to make classification decisions (e.g., pass/fail, achievement levels), the standard error of measurement at or near the cut scores has important implications for the trustworthiness of these decisions.</p>	No
The statistical model and procedure used to calculate the conditional standard error of measurement,	Standard 2.14: The model on which the computation of the conditional standard errors is based should be specified. (p. 46)	No
The percentage of test-takers who would be classified in the same way on two replications of the same test (decision-consistency) from a test-retest study.	Standard 2.16: Although decision consistency is typically estimated from the administration of a single form, it can and should be estimated directly through the use of a test-retest approach,	No
Descriptive disparities in overall test scores across minoritized groups. If descriptive differences exist, the vendor must report the conditional standard error of measurement (or test information function) for all	<p>Standard 2.15: When there is credible evidence for expecting that conditional standard errors of measurement or test information functions will differ substantially for various subgroups, investigation of the extent and impact of such differences should be undertaken and reported as soon as is feasible.</p> <p>Comment: If differences are found, they should be clearly indicated in the appropriate documentation. In addition, if substantial differences do exist, the test content and scoring models should be examined to see if there are legally acceptable alternatives that do not result in such differences.</p> <p>Standard 9.0: Test users are responsible for knowing the validity evidence in support of the intended interpretations of</p>	No

<p>impacted groups.</p>	<p>scores on tests that they use, from test selection through the use of scores, as well as common positive and negative consequences of test use...Test users who interpret and use the results of tests are responsible for ascertaining that there is appropriate validity evidence supporting their interpretations and uses of test results. In some circumstances, test users are also legally responsible for ascertaining the effect of their testing practices on relevant subgroups and for considering appropriate measures if negative consequences exist.</p>	
<p>The reliability and precision for each subsection of the exam.</p>	<p>Standard 2.0: A higher degree of reliability/precision is required for score uses that have more significant consequences for test takers.</p> <p>Standard 2.3: For each total score, subscore, or combination of scores that is to be interpreted, estimates of relevant indices of reliability/precision should be reported...Users should be supplied with reliability data for all scores to be interpreted, and these data should be detailed enough to enable the users to judge whether the scores are precise enough for the intended interpretations for use.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>The reliability and precision for different linguistic and cultural subgroups</p>	<p>Standard 2.11: Test publishers should provide estimates of reliability/precision as soon as feasible for each relevant subgroup for which the test is recommended...test users who work with a specific linguistic and cultural subgroup or with individuals who have a particular disability would benefit from an estimate of the standard error for the subgroup.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Adequate information about the sample and procedure for establishing reliability and precision to permit interpretation. Because multiple reliability tests are required by testing standards, the test vendor cannot substitute the results of one reliability test for a different one.</p>	<p>Standard 2.6: Internal-consistency, alternate-form, and test-retest coefficients should not be considered equivalent, as each incorporates a unique definition of measurement error. Error variances derived via item response theory are generally not equivalent to error variances estimated via other approaches. Test developers should state the sources of error that are reflected in, and those that are ignored by, the reported reliability or generalizability coefficients.</p> <p>Standard 2.19: Each method of quantifying the reliability/precision of scores should be described clearly and expressed in terms of statistics appropriate to the method. The sampling procedures used to select test takers for reliability/precision analyses and the descriptive statistics on these samples, subject to privacy obligations where applicable, should be reported.</p> <p>Standard 7.0: Information relating to tests should be clearly documented so that those who use tests can make informed decisions regarding which test to use for a specific purpose,</p>	<p>No</p>

	<p>how to administer the chosen test, and how to interpret test scores... Test documents should provide sufficient detail to permit reviewers and researchers to evaluate important analyses published in the test manual or technical report. For example, reporting correlation matrices in the test document may allow the test user to judge the data on which decisions and conclusions were based. Similarly, describing in detail the sample and the nature of factor analyses that were conducted may allow the test user to replicate reported studies. Test documentation will also help those who are affected by the score interpretations to decide whether to participate in the testing program or how to participate if participation is not optional.</p>	
<p>The test vendor must demonstrate equivalence of the examinations before and after any major change using an equating study which reports the reliability, conditional standard error of measurement (or test information curve), and test characteristic curve.</p>	<p>Standard 4.4: If test developers prepare different versions of a test with some change to the test specifications, they should document the content and psychometric specifications of each version. The documentation should describe the impact of differences among versions on the validity of score interpretations for intended uses and on the precision and comparability of scores... Test developers should document the extent to which the specifications differ from those of the original test, provide a rationale for the different versions, and describe the implications of such differences for interpreting the scores derived from the different versions.</p> <p>Standard 5.13: When claims of form-to-form score equivalence are based on equating procedures, detailed technical information should be provided on the method by which equating functions were established and on the accuracy of the equating functions.</p> <p>Comment: Evidence should be provided to show that equated scores on alternate forms measure essentially the same construct with very similar levels of reliability and conditional standard errors of measurement and that the results are appropriate for relevant subgroups. Technical information should include the design of the equating study, the statistical methods used, the size and relevant characteristics of examinee samples used in equating studies, and the characteristics of any anchor tests or anchor items. For tests for which equating is conducted prior to operational use (i.e., preequating), documentation of the item calibration process should be provided and the adequacy of the equating functions should be evaluated following operational administration.</p> <p>Standard 7.14: When a test or testing procedures are altered, the documentation for the test should include a</p>	<p>No</p>

	<p>discussion of how the alteration may affect the validity and comparability of the test scores, and evidence should be provided to demonstrate the effect of the alteration on the scores obtained from the altered test or testing procedures, if sample size permits.</p>	
<p>The test vendor must publish documentation to test users and test-takers that clearly indicates the date it was published and to which version of the examination it applies.</p>	<p>Standard 7.13 Some documents (e.g., administration instructions, user’s guides, sample tests or items) must be made available prior to the first administration of the test.</p> <p>Standard 7.14: When substantial changes are made to a test, the test’s documentation should be amended, supplemented, or revised to keep information for users current and to provide useful additional information or cautions.</p> <p>Comment: Supporting documents should clearly note the date of their publication as well as the name or version of the test for which the documentation is relevant. When substantial changes are made to items and scoring, information on the extent to which the old scores and new scores are interchangeable should be included in the test documentation.</p> <p>Standard 8.2: Test takers should be provided in advance with as much information about the test, the testing process, the intended test use, test scoring criteria, testing policy, availability of accommodations, and confidentiality protection as is consistent with obtaining valid responses and making appropriate interpretations of test scores.</p> <p>Comment: When appropriate, test takers should be informed in advance about test content, including subject area, topics covered, and item formats. General advice should be given about test-taking strategies. For example, test takers should usually be informed about the advisability of omitting responses and made aware of any imposed time limits, so that they can manage their time appropriately.</p>	<p>Belatedly, ASWB manuals now include a revision date, as of September 2025.</p>

ASWB makes wild, untested changes to its examinations without proper documentation and notification to boards and test-takers. In March 2025, ASWB changed the structure, timing, and break policy for its examination without fully notifying examinees for 15 days—a fact now preserved in public record thanks to the Maryland Workgroup. The rollout was so slapdash, they sold practice examinations with outdated rules for six months and updated handbooks without revision dates clearly indicating which version of the exam they covered.

ASWB violated these testing standards:

- Standard 4.4: If test developers prepare different versions of a test with some change to the test specifications, they should document the content and psychometric specifications of each version.
- Standard 5.13: Evidence should be provided to show that equated scores on alternate forms measure essentially the same construct with very similar levels of reliability and conditional standard errors of measurement and that the results are appropriate for relevant subgroups.
- Standard 7.13: Some documents (e.g., administration instructions, user’s guides, sample tests or items) must be made available prior to the first administration of the test.
- Standard 7.14: Supporting documents should clearly note the date of their publication as well as the name or version of the test for which the documentation is relevant.
- Standard 8.2: Test takers should usually be informed about the advisability of omitting responses and made aware of any imposed time limits, so that they can manage their time appropriately.

Timeline of ASWB exam changes and announcements

Date	ASWB Examination Policies and Announcements
November 2024- January 2025.	<p>ASWB’s (2025b) exam guidebook for their current test vendor, PSI, stated the long-standing exam administration policies of ASWB (emphasis added):</p> <p><i>“You will have four hours to complete the examination, which is administered on a PSI computer. The testing program allows the test-taker to move freely through the exam, change answers, flag questions for later attention, skip questions, highlight text, and review questions.”</i> (p. 5)</p> <p><i>“You may take breaks of up to 10 minutes during the four-hour exam at your discretion. Testing time does not stop for breaks.”</i> (p. 19).</p>
January 17, 2025	<p>Senior Director of Examination Services, Lavina Harless (2025), emailed ASWB member boards about the planned transition to PearsonVUE and promises to adequately inform all test-takers of examination administration changes.</p> <p>Important dates January 21: All registered candidates, including those who already have a testing appointment and those approved for nonstandard testing arrangements, will</p>

	<p>receive an email from ASWB about the change to exam administration. Information for test-takers will be available at aswb.org/news.</p> <p>January 22: Join an Engaging with ASWB session exclusively for ASWB members on Wednesday, January 22, at 3:00 p.m. ET to discuss this transition with ASWB staff. You will need to register for the meeting by Tuesday, January 21, at 5:00pm ET.</p> <p>January 28: PSI will cancel all appointments after March 15 and email scheduled test-takers. (para. 6)</p>
<p>February 26, 2025</p>	<p>ASWB (2025c) uploads a new PearsonVUE exam guidebook including a mix of their old policies and a partial list of new policies (emphasis added)</p> <p>“There are two types of breaks that you may take during your exam, a scheduled 10-minute break and unscheduled breaks” (p. 17)</p> <p><i>“You will be given the entire exam time at the beginning of the test.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are no individually timed sections, so manage your time accordingly”</i> (p. 17).</p> <p>“After you complete the first section, you will be prompted to review and submit your answers for that section. <i>You will no longer have access to those questions after you submit them</i>” (p. 17).</p> <p>“You will then have the option of taking a <i>scheduled break, during which the clock will stop for a maximum of 10 minutes.</i>” (p. 17).</p> <p><i>“You will have four hours to complete the examination, which is administered on a Pearson VUE computer. The testing program allows the test-taker to move freely through each section of the exam. Within the section, the test-taker may change answers, flag questions for later attention, skip questions, highlight text, and review questions.”</i> (p. 4)</p>
<p>February 28, 2025</p>	<p>ASWB (2025c) requires test-takers to sign the Candidate Rules Agreement, which includes language about ASWB’s guidebook.</p> <p><i>I have read the break policy in the ASWB Examination Guidebook. I understand that I will be required to submit the answers to the first section of the exam and that I may then take a 10-minute break, during which the clock will stop. The timer will continue during any additional unscheduled breaks I choose to take; therefore, it is in my best interest to use the restroom or otherwise address personal needs before beginning the exam. I will remain in the test center and may leave only to use the restroom facilities that are closest to the testing room.</i></p>
<p>March 13, 2026</p>	<p>Fellicia Dennison, Director of Exam Administration, emails ASWB member boards about the transition to PearsonVUE (obtained via Maryland Public Information Act). There is no mention of the new break policy, new examination structure, or equilibration studies provided.</p>

	<p>ASWB began the transition to Pearson VUE for test administration earlier this month. As a reminder, here are the important dates:</p> <p>March 3 or later: All registrations completed on March 3 or later are authorized for testing with Pearson VUE.</p> <p>March 15: Last day of testing at PSI test centers. The last day to schedule an appointment with PSI is March 14.</p> <p>March 16 through March 30: Pause in exam administration for transition from PSI to Pearson VUE.</p> <p>March 31: First day of testing at Pearson VUE test centers...</p> <p>We are continuing to work with our exam administration vendors to address needs related to testing appointment availability. Please reach out to me directly to discuss any specific needs or concerns” (para. 3)</p>
<p>March 15-30, 2025</p>	<p>No exams were administered in the two-week transition from PSI to PearsonVUE test vendors.</p>
<p>March 31, 2025</p>	<p>PearsonVUE implements a different break policy than the one written in ASWB’s Exam Guidebook. According to Director Harless’s testimony in the Maryland workgroup (Maryland Department of Health, 2025b), ASWB learned after PearsonVUE’s implementation that there are two individually timed 2-hour sections containing 85 items each.</p>
<p>April 9, 2025</p>	<p>Felicia Dennison (2025b) emails ASWB’s member boards restating some parts of the new policy and links to the PearsonVUE guidebook uploaded in February 26, 2025 as the authoritative source for information on breaks. Both this email and the linked guidebook omit the new rules that each section lasts two hours and any unused time in the first half does not get added to the second half (emphasis added):</p> <p>“Dear ASWB members,</p> <p>The transition to Pearson VUE is now complete. I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight some key exam administration changes and improvements that are now in effect for our member boards and exam candidates...</p> <p><i>On exam day: All test-takers now receive a scheduled 10-minute break in addition to the unscheduled breaks previously available. Page 17 of the ASWB Examination Guidebook includes more information on breaks” (para. 1-3).</i></p>
<p>April 10, 2025</p>	<p>ASWB (2025d) publishes a blog post restating some parts of the new policy, but omitting the rules that each section lasts two hours and any unused time in the first half does not get added to the second half (emphasis added):</p> <p>“As part of ASWB’s continuing efforts to improve the testing experience, test-takers now have a scheduled 10-minute break during the social work licensing exams. <i>After completing the first 85-question section, test-takers are prompted to review</i></p>

	<p><i>and submit their answers for that section. At that time, the 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, allowing test-takers to spend the full four hours answering questions” (para. 1)</i></p>
<p>April 14, 2025</p>	<p>ASWB (2025e) updates the PearsonVUE exam guidebook to reflect the full set of policies implemented on March 31st. ASWB provides no revision date, obscuring the version of record for the new and old exam format (emphasis added):</p> <p><i>“You will be given two hours for each 85-question section of the exam. If your time ends for a section, your answers will be automatically recorded, and you will not be able to go back to those questions.</i></p> <p><i>If you complete an 85-question section before the two-hour time limit has ended, you will be prompted to review and submit your answers for that section. You will no longer have access to those questions after you submit your answers.</i></p> <p><i>You may take less than 10 minutes for your scheduled break. Any remaining break time, however, will not extend the amount of time allocated for answering the remaining exam questions.</i></p> <p><i>When the break has expired, the exam clock automatically begins again. The second section has 85 questions, numbered 1 to 85. You will have two hours to complete the second section.</i></p>
<p>June 16, 2025:</p>	<p>ASWB (2025h) publishes another blog post explaining a complete version of the rules as well as mentioning, but not publishing, data on studies confirming the validity of the new approach:</p> <p><i>“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.” (para. 2).</i></p> <p><i>“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” (para. 6).</i></p>

Assessing ASWB PSYCHOMETRICS

#	NCME TESTING STANDARD	DOES ASWB COMPLY?	DO OTHER VENDORS COMPLY?
2.14	Where cut scores are specified for selection or classification, the standard errors of measurement should be reported in the vicinity of each cut score.	No	Yes, NCLEX Praxis
2.16	Although decision consistency is typically estimated from the administration of a single form, it can and should be estimated directly through the use of a test-retest approach,	No	No
2.19	Each method of quantifying the reliability/precision of scores should be described clearly and expressed in terms of statistics appropriate to the method. The sampling procedures used to select test takers for reliability/precision analyses and the descriptive statistics on these samples...should be reported.	No	Yes, NCLEX Praxis
7.14	When a test or testing procedures are altered, the documentation for the test should include a discussion of how the alteration may affect the validity and comparability of the test scores, and evidence should be provided to demonstrate the effect of the alteration on the scores obtained from the altered test or testing procedures	No	Yes, NCLEX Praxis



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Table 2. *First-time and Repeat Test-Takers*

Test-Takers	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
LCSW 1st	9,100	9,604	10,879	12,217	13,044	14,007	16,095	16,022	17,207	16,801	20,657
LMSW 1st	11,260	12,732	13,110	14,184	15,214	15,496	16,884	16,812	18,231	16,716	21,650
LBSW 1st	3,164	3,251	3,595	3,873	4,083	4,113	4,462	3,711	3,583	2,709	3,494
Repeat	No data	No data	No data	No data	11,457*	11,127*	12,617*	13,478*	19,526*	15,521*	20,720

To calculate repeat test-takers, researchers subtracted first-time test-takers reported in ASWB's 2022 *Exam Pass Rate Analysis* from the total test-takers in ASWB's *Annual Report* from the corresponding year.

*Because 2021 was the only year that ASWB reported the number of first-time test-takers for the Advanced Generalist and Associate social work exams, it is the only year for which repeat test-taker figures are based on the exact reporting from ASWB. For other years listed, the number of test-takers for Associates and Advanced Generalist from 2021 was imputed in place of the missing data.

Table 3. *ASWB Revenue, Assets, and Profit*

ASWB	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Revenue											
Publishing	--	--	--	--	\$1,686,190	\$1,489,956	\$1,562,915	\$1,704,718	\$1,751,079	\$1,684,234	\$2,123,620
Exam	--	--	--	--	\$11,345,503	\$11,689,451	\$12,996,484	\$13,277,694	\$14,410,319	\$13,735,930	\$17,659,247
Total	\$9,461,425	\$10,279,908	\$11,492,614	\$12,692,553	\$13,964,190	\$13,767,709	\$15,565,636	\$16,344,808	\$17,595,886	\$16,234,758	\$24,599,963
Net Assets	\$8,995,137	\$10,612,898	\$13,079,412	\$15,680,159	\$17,750,104	\$19,693,116	\$23,289,150	\$24,046,614	\$28,831,413	\$33,841,553	\$40,273,169
Profit Margin	10.61%	14.57%	20.64%	22.26%	19.47%	8.45%	14.85%	16.52%	15.56%	18.46%	29.08%

Note: Financial information is reported from ASWB's tax returns, as published in the ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer.