Licensing Frequently Asked Questions

NASW-MA offers a number of resources to help you in your journey to licensure including a Licensing Test Prep (LTP) course, a Social Work Licensing Exam Study Resource, and the Member-to-Member Supervision program. The following FAQ is a guide to assist you in furthering your understanding of the licensure process and requirements.

Massachusetts Social Work Licensing Information has been prepared as a service to NASW Members, authorized by The Massachusetts Board of Registration of Social Work.

### Update on DSM-5 & Social Work Licensing Exams


- What is the practice of social work?
- Who must be licensed?
- What is the purpose of social work licensing?
- How do I obtain a license and what are the fees?
- Do I have to take an examination?
- How can I get the best score on my licensing exam?
- What are the overall requirements for social work licensure in Massachusetts?
- What is my scope of practice?
- Who can I supervise?
- How can I get supervision?
- How many supervision hours do I need?
- What are my continuing education (CE) requirements?
- How and when do I need to renew my license?
- What happens if my license lapses?
- Is there reciprocity for social workers licensed outside of Massachusetts?
WHAT IS THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL WORK?

The practice of social work is the rendering or offering to render any clinical social work service, non-clinical social work service, or case management service, as defined in the Rules and Regulations: 258 CMR 8.05, to any individual, family, or group of individuals for any fee or other form of compensation, monetary or otherwise. For the specific definition of clinical social work service, non-clinical social work service, and case management go to www.mass.gov/ocabr/licensee/dpl-boards/sw/.

WHO MUST BE LICENSED?

All persons who practice social work, use the title “social worker” or any derivative thereof, or refer to themselves as practicing social work must be licensed in Massachusetts, unless they are a social worker for the county, state, or municipality, or a social work intern in a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Practicing social work without a license or performing functions reserved for a higher licensing level is cause for disciplinary action.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WORK LICENSING?

The purpose of licensing in social work is to assist the public through identification of standards for the safe professional practice of social work. The Massachusetts Board of Registration of Social Work (The Licensing Board) protects the public by disseminating and enforcing regulations for which licensees are held accountable. It determines eligibility for admission to examinations for social work, conducts examinations and licenses qualified individuals at one of four levels of licensure (Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, LICSW; Licensed Certified Social Worker, LCSW; Licensed Social Worker, LSW; Licensed Social Work Associate, LSWA). The Board holds meetings, hears complaints, and takes action as required with the assistance of the Division's legal counsel and investigators.

The Rules and Regulations 258 CMR 1.00 - 31.00 contain standards governing professional ethics and practice and explain the qualifications and functions for each license level. Every social worker should have a copy the Regulations. To obtain a copy, contact the State House Bookstore or download it from the Licensing Board’s website: www.mass.gov/ocabr/licensee/dpl-boards/sw/.

HOW DO I OBTAIN A LICENSE AND WHAT ARE THE FEES?

The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) processes social work licensing applications on behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Board of Registration of Social Workers, as authorized by the Division of Professional Licensure. Call 866-527-2384 and request a social work
license application or visit the ASWB website at [www.aswb.org](http://www.aswb.org) to download an application. Initial New Applicant fee for all licenses is $173.00.

Send the completed application, including fee, to ASWB for pre-screening. Those who meet licensing requirements will be sent written confirmation of your eligibility to test within two weeks. You will also receive scheduling instructions from ASWB as well as a copy of the ASWB Candidate Handbook.

All forms and fees should be submitted to:
**ASWB, Attn: Massachusetts Application, P.O. Box 1508, Culpeper, VA 22701**

*Do not send forms to the Licensing Board. Applicants for licensure in Massachusetts must follow the process of either the “New Applicant” section or the “Reciprocity Applicant” section as outlined in the instructions on the application materials.

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE AN EXAMINATION?**

Yes. In order to take the ASWB exam, you must first register with ASWB and pay the required exam fee of: $230 for the Associate, Bachelors, and Masters tests, and $260 for the Advanced Generalist and Clinical examinations. To register for the exam call ASWB at 1-888-579-EXAM (3926) or go to [www.aswb.org](http://www.aswb.org) to register online after you have received written confirmation of your eligibility to test.

ASWB offers four different categories of licensing exams- Clinical, Advanced Generalist, Masters, and Bachelors. Massachusetts, however, does not use the ASWB Advanced Generalist exam.

If you are pursuing your

- LICSW: take the Clinical exam;
- LCSW: take the Masters exam;
- LSW: take the Bachelors exam;
- LSWA: take the Associate exam.

Information about the Licensing Exams:

- There are 170 questions on the ASWB examination, but only 150 count toward your score. The remaining 20 are pre-test items, questions which are being evaluated for possible inclusion in the examination item pool.
- You will have four hours to complete the examination. If you feel you need accommodations for a disability, contact ASWB for **ADA accommodations** information at 1-800-225-6880 x3003. If you feel you need **ESL accommodations**, contact the Licensing Board at 617-727-3064.
- Tests are administered by appointment at Pearson VUE testing centers throughout the country. Registered candidates schedule a time to take the test, rather than following a fixed
examination schedule. Go to [http://www.pearsonvue.com/aswb/locate](http://www.pearsonvue.com/aswb/locate) to locate a testing center nearest you.

- A passing exam score in Massachusetts is a scaled score of 75. However, if you take the ASWB licensing exam and pass it in another state, your score will be valid in Massachusetts.
- After the exam, you will receive unofficial notice of your test result at the test site. ASWB will receive the official “pass” scores and will then notify you of your official score and indicate that you can now pay your initial licensure fee. Those who do not pass will also receive formal notification.

*You are not considered licensed until you pay your initial licensure fee and are issued a license number.*

**Paying your initial Licensure Fee** - Initial Licensure Fees to be paid once all requirements have been met:

LICSW: $82.00 • LCSW: $68.00 • LSW: $54.00 • LSWA: $42.00

Submit payment voucher and payment for your initial licensure fee to: ASWB, P.O. Box 1508, Culpeper, VA 22701

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**HOW CAN I GET THE BEST SCORE ON MY LICENSING EXAM?**

Preparing for your licensing exam can be easy when you have the right resources!

NASW-MA offers a Licensing Test Prep Course which is a one-day, live program that provides an overview of MA licensure regulations and of the examination process, a review of examination content areas, effective test-taking skills, and materials including a copy of the Social Work Licensing Exam Study Resource.

NASW-MA also provides a Social Work Licensing Exam Study Resource: 50 Sample Questions & Answers. The questions are authentic and the answers are complete with explanations. This resource is specifically designed to prepare individuals to pass ASWB Social Work Licensing Examinations. (This resource is for Masters Level Exams only.)

Practice makes perfect! Take as many practice tests as possible; you can find free additional online practice tests at [www.ASWB.org](http://www.ASWB.org).
WHAT ARE THE OVERALL REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK LICENSURE IN MASSACHUSETTS?

This is a summary; applicants must review the Massachusetts regulations for detailed requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Examination</th>
<th>Professional References</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
<th>Documented Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LICSW</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW, DSW or PhD in Social Work from a CSWE accredited school of social work</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
<td>Two professional references from appropriately licensed individuals (see instructions p. 2)</td>
<td>One supervisory reference from LICSW</td>
<td>Two years (3,500 hours) post-LCSW documented clinical experience with 50 face-to-face supervision hours per year (100 hours total) under a LICSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LCSW</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW, DSW or PhD in Social Work from a CSWE accredited school of social work</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One 2nd year field placement supervisory reference *</td>
<td>None required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LSW</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree in Social Work from a CSWE accredited school of social work</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One supervisory reference *</td>
<td>None required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree in any field</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One supervisory reference *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two and a half years (75 sem/100 qtr hours) of college</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One supervisory reference *</td>
<td>Two years (3,500 hours) post degree supervised experience from a BSW or MSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years (60 sem/80 qtr hours) of college</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One supervisory reference *</td>
<td>Five years (8,750 hours) of supervised experience from a BSW or MSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year (30 sem/40 qtr hours) of college</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One supervisory reference *</td>
<td>Six years (10,500 hours) of supervised experience from a BSW or MSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Two professional references *</td>
<td>One supervisory reference *</td>
<td>Eight years (14,000 hours) of supervised experience from a BSW or MSW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten years (17,500 hours) of supervised experience from a BSW or MSW
LSWA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Type</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Three references *</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>None required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree (or 60 sem/80 qtr hours) in human service field</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>Three references *</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree (or 120 sem/160 qtr hours) in any field</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>Three references *</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>Three references *</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Four years documented experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* At least one of the professional and/or supervisory references must be licensed as a LICSW or LCSW

WHAT IS MY SCOPE OF PRACTICE?

LICSW

An individual who holds a license as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) issued by the Board may properly perform or provide any or all of the following functions or services:

1. Practice social work autonomously in any clinical or non-clinical setting, utilizing consultation whenever appropriate;
2. Provide clinical social work services, as defined in 258 CMR 8.05, autonomously in any practice setting to individuals, couples, families or groups for the purpose of improving, restoring or enhancing their social and/or psychosocial functioning;
3. Provide case management services which involve the application of clinical diagnostic, assessment or treatment knowledge or skills autonomously in any practice setting;
4. Provide non-clinical social work services, as defined in 258 CMR 8.05, including case management services of a non-clinical nature, autonomously in any practice setting;
5. Provide clinical or non-clinical supervision to individual social workers or groups of social workers;
6. Provide consultation on clinical or non-clinical issues to individuals, groups, members of other professional disciplines, agencies, health care facilities or institutions; and
7. Perform or provide any other social work function or service which may lawfully be provided by a social worker licensed at the Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW), Licensed Social Worker (LSW) or Licensed Social Work Associate (LSWA) level.
LCSW

An individual who holds a license as a Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) issued by the Board may properly perform or provide any or all of the following social work functions or services:

1. Provide clinical social work services, as defined in 258 CMR 8.05, as an employee of an agency, health care facility or unrelated individual, under the clinical supervision of another social worker who is licensed or eligible for licensure as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and who provides at least one hour per week, or equivalent pro rata amount for part-time employees, of face-to-face individual clinical supervision. An individual who holds a license as a Licensed Certified Social Worker shall not provide clinical social work services as an independent practitioner;

2. Provide case management services which involve the application of clinical diagnostic, assessment or treatment knowledge or skills as an employee of an agency, health care facility or unrelated individual, under the clinical supervision of another social worker who is licensed or eligible for licensure as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and who provides at least one hour per week, or equivalent pro rata amount for part-time employees, of face-to-face individual clinical supervision. An individual who holds a license as a Licensed Certified Social Worker shall not provide this type of case management service as an independent practitioner;

3. Provide non-clinical social work services, as defined in 258 CMR 8.05, including case management services of a non-clinical nature, autonomously in any practice setting;

4. Provide non-clinical supervision to individual social workers or groups of social workers;

5. Provide consultation on clinical or non-clinical issues to individuals, groups, members of other professional disciplines, agencies, health care facilities, or institutions, as long as any consultation on clinical issues is provided under the clinical supervision of another social worker who is licensed or eligible for licensure as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and who provides at least one hour per week of face-to-face individual clinical supervision; and

6. Perform or provide any other social work function or service which can properly be performed or provided by a social worker licensed at the Licensed Social Worker (LSW) or Licensed Social Work Associate (LSWA) level.

LSW

An individual who holds a license as a Licensed Social Worker (LSW) issued by the Board may properly perform any or all of the following functions or services:

1. Provide non-clinical social work services, as defined in 258 CMR 8.05, as an employee of an agency, health care facility or unrelated individual, under the supervision of an individual who is licensed or eligible for licensure as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) or as a Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) and who provides at least one hour per week, or equivalent pro rata amount for part-time employees, of face-to-face supervision which if provided in a group format may include no more than four supervisees;
2. Provide case management services of a non-clinical nature as an employee of an agency, health care facility or unrelated individual, under the supervision of an individual who is licensed or eligible for licensure as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) or as a Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) and who provides at least one hour per week of face-to-face supervision, which if provided in a group format may include no more than four supervisees;

3. Provide administrative, but not clinical, supervision to individual social workers or groups of social workers who are licensed or eligible for licensure as Licensed Social Workers (LSWs) or Licensed Social Work Associates (LSWAs);

4. Provide consultation on non-clinical issues only to individuals, groups, members of other professional disciplines, agencies, health care facilities or institutions; and

5. Perform or provide any other social work function or service which may properly be performed by a social worker licensed at the Licensed Social Work Associate (LSWA) level.

LSWA

An individual who holds a license as a Licensed Social Work Associate (LSWA) issued by the Board may properly perform any or all of the following social work functions or services, provided that all such functions or services are performed as an employee of an agency, health care facility or unrelated individual, under the supervision of a social worker who is licensed or eligible for licensure at the Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW), Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) or Licensed Social Worker (LSW) level and who provides at least one hour per week of face-to-face supervision, which if provided in a group format may include no more than four supervisees:

1. Obtain information from agency clients and/or applicants for services to determine their service needs and/or the availability of appropriate resources;

2. Assist individuals or groups in identifying and making use of resources and services which are available to resolve day-to-day problems (e.g., employment, housing, health care, child care, financial assistance problems, etc.); and

3. Gather factual information and data for use in conducting social services research, including but not limited to working with the community to identify unmet service needs.

WHO CAN I SUPERVISE?

LICSWs

- Can provide clinical or non-clinical supervision to individual social workers or groups of social workers
LCSWs

- Can provide non-clinical supervision to individual social workers or groups of social workers.
- Can provide consultation on clinical or non-clinical issues to individuals, groups, members of other professional disciplines, agencies, health care facilities, or institutions, as long as any consultation on clinical issues is provided under the clinical supervision of another social worker who is licensed or eligible for licensure as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and who provides at least one hour per week of face-to-face individual clinical supervision.
  - LCSWs may not provide any clinical supervision to any other mental health practitioners. Such supervisory practices would constitute practicing beyond the scope of their practice for LCSWs.
  - LCSWs may not complete clinical supervision forms for applicants applying for licensure in any of the mental health professions, attesting that they provided clinical supervision for these applicants. The Board will consider such documentation as evidence of practicing beyond the scope of practice for LCSWs, which may result in disciplinary action being taken against the LCSW for violation of 258 CMR 12.02.

LSWs

- Cannot provide clinical supervision.
- Can provide administrative supervision to individual social workers or groups of social workers who are licensed or eligible for licensure as Licensed Social Workers (LSWs) or Licensed Social Work Associates (LSWAs).

LSWAs

- Cannot provide any supervision.

If you have an LICSW and would like to supervise an aspiring social worker you can join our Member-to-Member Supervision program! This program helps LCSW members obtain LICSW supervision not provided at their worksites. LCSWs' requests are matched by practice specialty, location, interests, and accessibility to public transportation.

HOW CAN I GET SUPERVISION?

Most organizations and agencies will provide supervision for you. If your organization or agency does not provide appropriate supervision, you can join our Member-to-Member Supervision program! This program helps LCSW members obtain LICSW supervision not provided at their worksites. LCSWs' requests are matched by practice specialty, location, interests, and accessibility to public transportation.
HOW MANY SUPERVISION HOURS DO I NEED?

If you are working under supervision full time (35 or more hours per week) please refer to the chart found under the question “WHAT ARE THE OVERALL REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK LICENSURE IN MASSACHUSETTS?”

If you are working less than 35 hours per week, you have a prorated requirement for supervision per week (35 work hours = 1 hour of supervision). However, you must always have at least 1 hour supervision minimum every month (~15 minutes/week).

Example:

- If you work a total of 20 hours in a week you need 0.6 hours of supervision per week (36 minutes).
- If you work a total of 17.5 hours in a week you need 0.5 hours of supervision per week (30 minutes).
- If you work a total of 8.75 hours in a week you need 0.25 hours of supervision per week (15 minutes)
- BUT if you work less than 8.75 hours in a week you MUST still have 15 minutes of supervision per week.

WHAT ARE MY CONTINUING EDUCATION (CE) REQUIREMENTS?

All licenses expire on October 1st of every even year. Licensees must complete the required amount of continuing education hours prior to the renewal date of their license.

Required CE Hours - LICSW: 30 hours • LCSW: 20 hours • LSW: 15 hours • LSWA: 10 hours

See the Rules and Regulations 258 CMR 1.00 - 31.00 for additional information about Social Work CE Requirements. Additionally, NASW-MA has provided a list of Continuing Education FAQs.

HOW AND WHEN DO I NEED TO RENEW MY LICENSE?

It is your responsibility to renew your license by October 1 of every even year. This is true even if you received your license just months before the renewal date. Renewals are sent approximately 90 days prior to renewal date and you should receive a computerized license renewal application (which includes CE information). Sign it and return it with the renewal fee to the address indicated. It is the licensee’s responsibility to ensure that the address on file at the Licensing Board is up to date and current.
License Renewal Fees - LICSW: $82.00 • LCSW: $68.00 • LSW: $54.00 • LSWA: $42.00
** There is a $57 late fee for renewing after October 1

IF YOU DON’T RECEIVE A RENEWAL APPLICATION, IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GET ONE FROM THE LICENSING BOARD. CALL 617-727-3064.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY LICENSE LAPSES?

Those who miss the October 1 deadline and have an expired license may not practice, regardless of the circumstances.

Lapsed Licenses:

- **Within one year** after the expiration date, can be renewed by submitting the renewal application along with the specified renewal fee, and late fee of $57.00.
- **More than one year**, but less than two years after the expiration date, can be reinstated by submitting the re-licensure application along with documentation of continuing education to ASWB. If approved, a new license number will be issued.
- **More than two years** after the expiration date, can be reinstated by submitting the re-licensure application and taking the ASWB licensing exam. If approved, a new license number will be issued.

Licensees seeking re-licensure must meet the applicable requirements for initial licensure within the Licensing Board’s Rules & Regulations. Applicants who were “grandfathered” in at the LCSW or LICSW levels must show evidence of an MSW degree from an accredited school of social work.

IS THERE RECIPROCITY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS LICENSED OUTSIDE OF MASSACHUSETTS?

Social workers licensed in other states must acquire a Massachusetts license in order to practice in this state. Social workers licensed in other states who met substantially equivalent requirements as Massachusetts’, including the appropriate level ASWB examination, may be able to obtain a license without taking an examination. Call 866-527-2384 and request a social work license application or visit the ASWB website at www.aswb.org to download a Reciprocity application.