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May 22, 2025

Senator Ray Fonseca

Chairman

Virgin Islands of the United States

Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services

83RC+258, Charlotte Amalie

St Thomas 00802, U.S. Virgin Islands

***Re: Support for Bill No. 36-0050, Bill No. 36-0051***

Dear Chairman Fonseca and Distinguished Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0050 and Bill No. 36-0051. My name is Cara Sanner. I am the Director of Regulatory Services for the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). ASWB was founded in 1979 to develop and administer the social work licensing examinations used nationally. ASWB provides a breadth of resources, services and technical assistance to support U.S. and Canadian member jurisdictions in their roles to administer social work regulations for the protection of the public. ASWB supports Bills No. 36-0050 and 36-0051 because the proposals align the U.S. Virgin Islands with majority of U.S. state regulatory frameworks. The increased adherence to consistent, evidence-based regulatory standards and best practices strengthens public protection and increases access to quality social work services. Importantly, the changes proposed in the bills enables the U.S. Virgin Islands future participation in the Social Work Licensure Compact – further supporting Virgin Islanders by expanding service access to residents and employment opportunities to licensed social workers.

ASWB staff has worked with representatives of the U.S. Virgin Islands Social Work Board (Board) and the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) starting in 2021, when the Board identified the need to update its regulatory framework. ASWB appreciates the collaborative work of the Board and DLCA, and the opportunity to provide input into the development of the statutory proposals before you now. Board Chairperson Juliette Millin and DLCA Commissioner H. Nathalie Hodge have shepherded this process and provided leadership throughout. Central to the ASWB mission is public protection, ensuring safe, competent, and ethical social work practice through sound regulatory standards. It is for this reason that ASWB supports Bills No. 36-0050 and 36-0051 as discussed below.

**Protecting Public Health, Safety, and Welfare**

The proposed legislation strengthens and codifies licensure standards, ensuring that only qualified, ethical, and competent professionals are authorized to provide social work services. A well-structured licensing framework is essential to protecting vulnerable individuals and families, particularly in areas such as child welfare, mental health, and elder care.

**Support for Regulatory Strengthening**

ASWB thanks the U.S. Virgin Islands Legislature for taking meaningful steps to modernize and reinforce the current social work regulatory framework by adopting the proposed legislation. The bills ensure that licensure is based on

consistent, validated benchmarks of education, competence, and ethical conduct, critical components for public safety and professional accountability, particularly in underserved communities.

### **Alignment with National Standards**

Bill No. 36-0050 and Bill No. 36-0051 align with national best practices in licensure and support broader efforts toward regulatory consistency. Specifically, the bills:

- Establish clear licensure categories for bachelors, masters, and clinical social workers, each with distinct scopes of practice, and titles like those used across the U.S.
- Require demonstration of competence through successful completion of a validated, uniform, national competence assessment examination. The ASWB exams are continuously vetted and provide an objective measure of entry-level competence to practice. Developed in partnership with licensed practitioners, the exams are subjected to rigorous psychometric evaluation and anti-bias review, consistent with standards set by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.
- Promote licensure mobility by aligning with standards that facilitate cross-jurisdictional licensure recognition, a key consideration in addressing workforce shortages and meeting evolving public health needs.

Bills No. 36-0050 and 36-0051 establish a regulatory framework that enables practitioners from the U.S. Virgin Islands to join the Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact, if it is adopted by the legislature. The Compact allows qualified social workers to obtain multistate licenses, improving mobility and access to care. Amid workforce shortages and rising demand for services, the Compact reduces barriers to practice, enhances continuity of care for clients who move or travel, and lessens administrative burdens for licenses. It also strengthens public protection by upholding shared professional standards across jurisdictions. ASWB supports the Compact as a vital step toward improving access to qualified social workers and ensuring consistent, high-quality care across state and territorial lines.

ASWB commends the Virgin Islands Legislature for its commitment to strengthening the regulation of social work and safeguarding public welfare by passing this legislation. ASWB stands ready to provide data, policy guidance, and technical support as you continue this important work.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Cara Sanner  
Director of Regulatory Services  
Association of Social Work Boards

*ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.*