



**Written Testimony of NASW-NJ to the Senate Commerce Committee
in SUPPORT of S-2708
November 14, 2019**

Madame Chairperson and distinguished Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in **SUPPORT** of bill S-2708, which permits certain undocumented immigrants to obtain professional and occupational licensure in our state.

The National Association of Social Workers is the largest organization of professional social workers in the world. The New Jersey Chapter, with nearly 6,500 members, is the third largest in the nation. We represent the interests of more than 21,000 licensed social workers across our state and the hundreds of thousands of clients they serve each day.

Work is more than a means to earning a paycheck; it offers purpose and structure to one's life and instills an inherent sense of self-worth and value. Moreover, it allows individuals to reach their full potential and contribute to the broader society. The legislation under consideration today will create increased career opportunities for DACA recipients and other immigrant children—many of whom are now young, educated adults preparing for careers—by providing more paths to stable employment, increased earnings, meaningful work, and improved quality of life. It will also create incentives for these individuals to remain in our state, raise families of their own, and support our residents and economy.

Given the increasing diversity of our state's population and the number and variety of immigrant communities—both documented and undocumented—it will be wholly beneficial for qualified and trained individuals from those communities to be given the opportunity to obtain professional or occupational licensure so they can give back to the communities in which they were raised.

With specific regard to the profession of social work, implementation of this law stands to have a direct and positive impact on the field of practice and the consumers served by social workers. Some of the strongest, most passionate practitioners in the field are those who have lived experience in their area of practice—therapists who have experienced their own mental health crises; child protection workers who grew up in the child welfare system. Likewise, an immigrant child who has grown and matured in our state has extremely valuable lived experiences, unique to their circumstances—as well as linguistic skills—that can inform their practice of social work and improve their ability to help consumers.

Considering the growing need for social workers and other health/mental health professionals in our state—particularly those who are multi-lingual and multi-cultural—it behooves us to allow DACA recipients and other similarly situated immigrants to enter the field of licensed social work practice to increase our ability to provide culturally-informed services to those most in need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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