



# REMOVING THE FLORIDA TEACHER CERTIFICATION EXAM FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

## PROPOSAL

**Amend Section 1012.55(b), Florida Statute, specifically to exclude School Social Workers from the mandatory Professional Education Exam – Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE) to retain highly qualified School Social Workers in our K-12 public schools.**

### Present Situation and Rationale

- Currently, individuals seeking professional certification as a School Social Worker from the Florida Department of Education must pass the Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE). This exam aims to “ensure that all teacher candidates demonstrate the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge necessary to effectively instruct students in Florida.” The exam also assesses knowledge of competencies, such as instructional design, student-centered learning environments, instructional delivery and facilitation, instructional practices for English Language Learners, and literacy strategies. While relevant to teaching, these competencies are not applicable to the specialized role of School Social Worker, nor does the professional role itself require knowledge or skill in these competency areas. As such, the current certification process places an undue burden on School Social Workers and fails to reflect the core competencies of their profession.

### Impact of Proposed Change

- The proposed change would enable our School District to retain highly skilled and qualified School Social Workers by eliminating the unnecessary barrier of an exam unrelated to their profession. The proposed change would also alleviate the burdensome process of preparing for and taking the Professional Education Test, which can demand significant time, effort, and tutoring. Moreover, the cost of \$150 per attempt can be a significant financial burden for the School Social Worker. By eliminating this requirement, we can ensure that they can focus on their vital work without undue distractions.

### Historical Perspective

- Under Florida DOE rule, School Social Worker candidates must hold a Master’s degree in Social Work – a highly specialized and clinical degree program. This graduate degree prepares Social Workers for the various specialized competencies needed for the role. Approximately twelve Social Workers in Lee County could not pass the FTCE over the last two years. These employees had to terminate employment or, for those who have also obtained Department of Health licensure as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, transition into the role of Licensed Mental Health Professional (LMHP). Given that the Professional Educator Examination - FTCE assesses knowledge and competencies neither included in the social work program of graduate study nor relevant to the practice of School Social Work, the requirement has resulted in the loss of employment of highly effective Social Workers. Additionally, this requirement is not consistent with professionally similar roles such as the Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHP).

### Fiscal Impact

- The fiscal impacts of the proposed change include significant cost savings for the School District, as over a dozen School Social Workers who were recruited, hired, trained, and developed by the District had to terminate employment or seek other roles due to their inability to pass the Professional Education Test. This creates additional, ongoing expenses related to recruitment, hiring, training, and employee turnover that could be better spent on retraining experienced staff. Furthermore, School Social Workers are currently burdened by the \$150 exam fee, of which some highly qualified staff have taken as many as 10 times. Removing this fee would ensure these dedicated professionals can focus on their crucial work without financial stress.

### Statute Impacted

- F.S. 1012.55(b)

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