

FAQ Highlights: 2026 Social Work Legislation

Why is a provisional license needed?

Kentucky law has been silent on student practice since 1974. Students often provide services in field placements under unclear authority, which creates risk for clients, students, supervisors, universities, and agencies. Complaints have been received involving unlicensed practice by students. A provisional license will replace this gray zone with defined scope, supervision, and accountability.

Does the provisional license replace field education?

No. The provisional license works alongside existing practicum structures. It clarifies legal authority, protects students from exploitation, and ensures they practice within defined guardrails. Educators across Kentucky, through KASWE, have endorsed the provisional license as the best way to strengthen field education while keeping clients safe.

Will students practice independently?

No. Provisional licensees will only practice under the supervision of a Kentucky LCSW. They cannot diagnose, act independently, or provide therapy without supervision.

What protections exist for clients?

Provisional licensees who are under Board jurisdiction must receive weekly supervision and follow the KY Code of Ethical Conduct. Clients can file complaints directly with the Board if concerns arise.

How does this affect supervisors, universities, and agencies?

Currently, LCSWs supervising students face malpractice risk because student practice is not legally recognized. Insurers may deny coverage, leaving LCSWs personally liable. Universities and agencies also face liability in this gray zone. A provisional license reduces risk for all parties by defining scope, supervision, and accountability.

Has the profession reached consensus?

Yes. With KASWE's endorsement, the profession has already demonstrated meaningful consensus on moving forward. The provisional license aligns social work with other health professions in Kentucky that authorize student practice, and ensures students are prepared for the workforce.

Bottom Line: The provisional license strengthens public protection, safeguards LCSWs, supports educators, and prepares students for practice.

The Board welcomes input from licensees, students, educators, and the public. Please send additional questions or comments to Marc Kelly at marc.kelly@ky.gov.