

January 16, 2023

House Bill 103

State Board of Social Work Examiners - Temporary License to Practice Social Work

House Health and Government Operations

Position: FAVORABLE

I am Steven Acerno, Director of the Treatment Foster Care program at The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region and current chair of The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY). MARFY is an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in the foster care system due to abuse, neglect, severe mental health issues, and complex medical needs. The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region's Treatment Foster care Program serves youth with emotional/behavioral issues, medically fragile youth as well as teen mothers.

The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region foster care program employs licensed social workers to provide case management and clinical services to these children and their families. Currently, there is a shortage of licensed social workers throughout the state of Maryland. This shortage directly and drastically impacts the number of children and families which the provider community is capable of serving. Private programs in the state have regulatory limits on the caseload size of social workers. The inability to fill positions results in fewer youth receiving care. In this time when we have a shortage of placement options for children in foster care, we need practical and immediate solutions to ensure that qualified individuals are available to enter the workforce.

Individuals who enter the social work field enter it because they have a passion to help those in need, for social justice, and to advocate for those who do not have a voice. The state of Maryland is experiencing a workforce crisis related to social workers entering the field, and it is imperative that we make it possible for these individuals to do the good work they are trained for as soon as possible. While we understand the necessity of maintaining high standards in the social work field and the

role which licensure plays in that, there needs to be a tool to bridge the gap when unforeseen delays prevent test accessibility. House Bill 103 would be critical in providing this tool by putting a system in place so that in the event the social work licensing exam is not available, candidates who are otherwise qualified to perform social work duties could do so under a certified supervisor.

The provider community is committed to a multi-disciplinary approach to alleviating this workforce crisis. The passage of this bill will help to remove the first barrier to our ability to meet this exponentially growing need. It is for these reasons that I respectfully ask for a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 103. Thank you.

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