

Favorable testimony for SB0871 and SB0145

Submitted on behalf of the following:
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Dear Members of the Maryland Health and Government Operations Committee,

We are writing to share our support for SB0871 and SB0145. As Associate Deans at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, we are invested in ensuring an equitable path to licensure for our MSW graduates. The exam pass rates released by the Association of Social Work Boards in 2022 clearly indicate significant disparities based on social identities, something that is deeply troubling in a field that seeks to further social justice and equity within our society.

Our MSW students all receive the same educational opportunities at our school, yet the difference in pass rates for students who are Black, older, or whose first language is not English is marked – this is true in MSW programs across the state and across the country. If students receive the same education, yet Black students pass at substantially lower rates, there are few options to explain the disparity. Either we can accept that the exam has cultural bias and benefits those from majority identities, or we can accept the alternative, which is that Black students (and others who fail at disproportionate rates) are less competent practitioners. We hope that we can all agree that the latter is preposterous and can commit to fixing the inherent issues with the exam, or creating another, equitable, pathway to licensure.

The state of Maryland has a shortage of social workers which contributes to our citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalized, having difficulty accessing services. This shortage is even greater among diverse social who hold minoritized and marginalized identities , many of whom have struggled to pass the LMSW exam. Creating a pathway that allows these dedicated professionals to practice will benefit the citizens of Maryland and the social work profession as a whole. Having a more diverse social work workforce is also important for social work students who need to see themselves represented in the profession.

We therefore support these bills, including the need for a work group to form to examine the exam and explore all potential options to allow all qualified social workers to engage in practice. We also support allowing temporary licenses for the LBSW and LMSW.

In the future, we hope that legislation will reinstate the moratorium on licensing exams that leads to underrepresentation of otherwise qualified social workers of Color, older social workers, and social workers whose first language is not English. In addition, we hope that future legislation will require the BSWE to grant temporary licensure to qualified candidates. This

language is important in that it will compel the BSWE to make this change rather than leaving it to the discretion of this singular body.

Again, we support these bills as written, and also hope future sessions will go further to address disparities in licensure exam pass rates. We are committed to working together to ensure that all social workers are able to practice the profession that they have chosen and worked tirelessly to gain the necessary education and experience. Thank you for your consideration.

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