

Let Maryland Social Workers Go To Work For Our Community

Support SB871 and SB145!

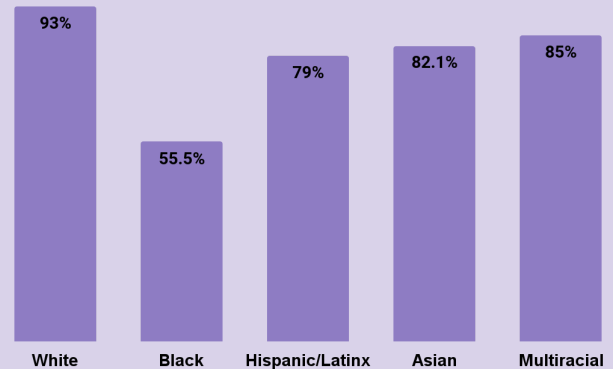
There are vast disparities in social work licensure exam scores. The exams, which lack evidence that they ensure safe or effective practice, leave thousands of social workers out of the workforce. We cannot afford to keep these discriminatory exams in a mental health crisis with a severe shortage of social workers. Marylanders need more social workers that share their identities and experiences. **We must pass two pieces of legislation to address these harmful disparities. We support this legislation with or without requested amendments.**

SB871 This bill mandates a workgroup to develop recommendations for a fairer path to licensure. We also ask for an amendment that reinstates the original language, **placing an immediate moratorium on using an exam as a requirement for social work licensure.** All other requirements for licensure would remain in place.

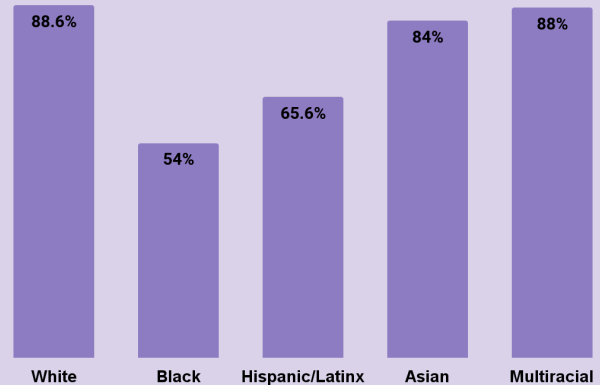
SB145 authorizes a temporary license to practice social work to an applicant who, except for passing an exam, has met the appropriate education and experience requirements for a license issued to practice. **We also recommend an amendment to replace the word “May” with “Shall”, taking away discretion of the Social Work Board of Examiners, who have not been supportive of efforts to address these biased exams.**

Data released from the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) in August 2022 show alarming racial disparities in pass rates¹

LMSW Exam First-Time Pass Rate in Maryland from 2011 to 2021



LCSW-C Exam First-Time Pass Rate in Maryland from 2011 to 2021



The disparities don't end at race. Pass rates consistently go down as test taker age goes up. Test takers whose first language is something other than English also have significantly lower pass rates. ASWB has not released data on test-takers with disabilities.

Neither of these bills ends social work licensure. There are already substantial requirements for licensure, including graduation from a nationally accredited school—which includes hundreds of supervised hours of fieldwork, thousands of hours of supervised practice, and a background check. This is a sufficient baseline to ensure that social workers are prepared to practice safely and equitably.

Over a thousand social workers are missing from Maryland's workforce. If all test-takers passed at the same rate as white test-takers from 2011 to 2021, we would have 1227 more licensed social workers in Maryland.²

There is no evidence that licensing exams serve any purpose. After 40 years of licensure exams, there is still no evidence of a relationship between exam scores and safe, ethical, or effective social work. However, evidence indicates ongoing validity problems³ and racial microaggressions embedded in exam questions⁴. ASWB, which creates and administers the exams, does not follow the best practice methodological standards laid out by the National Council on Measurement in Education.

The NASW agrees that the exam must go. On February 3, 2023, the National Association of Social Workers announced that they oppose the use of the ASWB exams, based on the clear and incontrovertible evidence that they discriminate against marginalized groups.⁵

Public safety is improved when more social workers are regulated by Boards of Social Work.

Illinois is leading the way, it's time for other states to follow. In 2021, Illinois removed the exam requirement for social workers applying for the LSW license. According to the NASW-IL chapter, in the year before the law went into effect, only 421 social workers became licensed. Since then, 2600 more social workers have become licensed.

We cannot continue to allow this exam to keep competent, compassionate social workers from serving those in need. The alarming outcome disparities, along with ongoing issues of validity, prove that the exams are needlessly perpetuating inequality, keeping social workers from making a living and advancing in their profession. Social work, and our communities, stand to benefit from a more diverse network of professionals.

Please support SB871 and SB145! (*with amendments)

Visit [swear-md.org](https://www.swear-md.org) or email hello@swear-md.org to learn more or get involved.

¹ Association of Social Work Boards (2022). [Contributing to the conversation: 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis](#)

² Association of Social Work Boards (2022). [Exam pass rates by state/province](#)

³ Caldwell, B.E. & Rousmaniere, T. (2022). [Clinical licensing exams in mental health care.](#)

⁴ Castex, G., Senreich, E., Phillips, N. K., Miller, C. M., & Mazza, C. (2019). [Microaggressions and racial privilege within the social work profession: The social work licensing examinations.](#) Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 28(2), 211-228.

⁵ National Association of Social Workers (Feb. 3, 2023). [NASW Opposes Association of Social Work Boards \(ASWB\) Exams](#)