



Tuesday, March 28, 2023

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Health & Government Operations Committee Members,

**Senate Bill 145** and **SB871** offer long overdue relief to social workers, agencies, and communities in need. My name is Maria Smith and I live in Rockville, District 18. I provide virtual mental health services to individuals throughout the state of Maryland and received my MSW in 2014.

My first job did not require a social work license and paid \$40k a year. At the time, I paid \$500 a month in student loans. Given my low salary and high debt-to-income ratio, my landlord wasn't sure I'd have \$750 a month in rent. So I applied to be a Licensed Master Social Worker or "LMSW" to obtain a job that paid \$50k a year. I passed the LMSW exam on my first try and received the promotion.

During that same time period, colleagues with much more experience & expertise struggled to pass the LMSW exam. Failing to pass meant losing long-held employment, and more vacancies for our agency. These colleagues were often Bilingual, English as a second language speakers, and immigrants to the U.S. with families to support. Most were also older (a lot wiser) than 24 year-old me.

As I worked towards my LCSW-C, I watched young, white, middle class, female colleagues and I pass the clinical exam on our first try, resulting in competitive job offers. During this same time period, I once again witnessed Bilingual colleagues, English as a second language speakers (this time, children of immigrants) struggle to pass the clinical exam, all while often being more qualified to work with immigrant youth & families.

So many people throughout our state are struggling right now. What a gift it would be to employers, employees, and communities in-need, to offer an immediate solution to the workforce crisis, while also addressing a problem that has gone on for far too long.

Thank you for your time.

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