

**SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS OF SENATE BILL 145**  
**State Board of Social Work Examiners – Conditional and Temporary Licenses**  
**to Practice Social Work**

**FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**March 30, 2023**

Thank you, Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, for your serious consideration of SB 145 – and your work on this important issue. I strongly support SB 145, but respectfully request amendments to restore its strength.

**As I have noted in my previous testimony (on SB 871), the social work licensing exams do not assess whether someone will practice competently or safely, and anyone who claims that they do must accept an absurd and offensive position** - that white people are more competent social workers than Black people, younger people are safer social workers than older people, native English speakers are more accountable social workers than non-native English speakers, and people who are not disabled are more ethical social workers than those who are disabled. Despite claims to be driven by evidenced-based practices, there is no evidence of a relationship between exam scores and safe, effective, or ethical social work,<sup>i</sup> and **there is ample evidence of the harm caused by the exams<sup>ii</sup> – both on those who repeatedly fail the exams, and those who cannot be served due to Maryland’s shortage of social workers, which is made significantly worse by the exam disparities.<sup>iii</sup>**

**I respectfully request amendments that would require the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) to act – changing language from “may” to “shall”.** While the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) has only recently released data demonstrating clear and alarming disparities in pass rates,<sup>iv</sup> these have been well-known for years, and yet the ASWB and other social work leaders have failed to act with any decisiveness. Indeed, the BSWE has opposed efforts to end the bias and harm associated with current licensure practices. **Those who have repeatedly failed to act and have consistently opposed action to address this problem should not be given discretion over whether to grant temporary licenses to otherwise qualified practitioners. Their failures necessitate your strong action.**

**I respectfully request amendments that would expand the conditional licensure beyond the Bachelor- and Master-level – to LCSW-Cs as well.** The LCSW and LCSW-C exams demonstrate the same disparities in passage rates. White people aren’t more competent as clinicians. Younger people aren’t safer as clinicians, native English speakers aren’t more accountable as clinicians, and “able-bodied” people aren’t more ethical as clinicians. **If the disparities are unfounded and unacceptable at all levels of licensure, they should be addressed at all levels of licensure.**

I thank you for your time and consideration, and I strongly urge a favorable report on SB 145 – with amendments that ensure action to address harm cause at all levels of licensure.

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- <sup>i</sup> Caldwell, B.E. & Rousmaniere, T. (2022). Clinical licensing exams in mental health care. <https://www.psychotherapynotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Clinical-Licensing-Exams-in-Mental-Health-Care-October-2022.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> 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. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15313204.2018.1555498>
- <sup>iii</sup> Association of Social Work Boards (2022). Exam pass rates by state/province. <https://www.aswb.org/exam/contributing-to-the-conversation/aswb-exam-pass-rates-by-state-province/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Association of Social Work Boards (2022). Contributing to the conversation: 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis. <https://www.aswb.org/exam/contributing-to-the-conversation/>