

March 28, 2023

To: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Rebecca Davis, MSW, Assistant Director of The Center for Restorative Change, University of Maryland School of Social Work

Scott Stafford, MSW, MDiv, Director of Academic Affairs, University of Maryland School of Social Work

Re: SB0871 Social Workers - Sunset Extension, Notification of Complete Application, and Workgroup on Social Worker Examination Requirements for Licensure

SB0145 State Board of Social Work Examiners - Conditional and Temporary Licenses to Practice Social Work

Position: Favorable

We are staff and administrators at the University of Maryland School of Social Work and residents of Maryland (District 21 and District 45). ASWB exam data released in August 2022 confirms there has been financial, mental, emotional harm to people who are older, Deaf & hard of hearing, non-native English speakers, and/or [People of the Global Majority](#) by keeping them from entering and advancing in our profession.

We support a favorable vote on SB0871 and S0145.

These bills create a work group specifically focused on addressing alternatives to culturally biased exams as well as provide an opportunity for people with Bachelors of Social Work (BSWs) and Masters of Social Work (MSWs) degrees to enter and advance in the social work profession. These bills are critically important to us because we are dedicated to advancing mental health supports that reflect the communities most impacted by racialized oppression and poverty.

As social workers employed for over ten years by the University of Maryland, year after year we witness graduating social workers of color fail the social work exam, especially on the first try. Social workers of color continue to pay for test preparation services for multiple pass attempts that can total well over \$1,000 (BIPOC students report multiple mentors suggest they approach the exam from a white perspective in order to pass). At the same time these same social workers are deeply invested in their communities and have completed 2 or more years of graduate school demonstrating the highest quality of social work practice.

As a school, we received record-breaking interest in our job fair for graduates, indicating the increasing demand for social workers in Maryland. We also continue to receive regular requests for social work services as we partner with Baltimore City Public Schools around crisis support related to community violence and grief & loss. We need more social workers in Maryland.

The exams, which lack evidence that they ensure safe or effective practice, leave thousands of social workers out of the workforce. If all test-takers passed at the same rate as white test-takers from 2011 to 2021, we would have 1,227 more licensed social workers in Maryland. (Association of Social Work Boards (2022). [Exam pass rates by state/province](#))

We cannot afford to keep these discriminatory exams in place while we cope with increasing rates of community violence, mental health needs and 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.**

In addition to a **favorable vote**, we strongly support the following amendments:

SB0871

Reinstatement of the 1-year moratorium on all social work licensing exams. While we wait for a workgroup to identify long-term solutions, social work professionals already licensed at the Master's Level (LMSWs) will continue to be denied promotions while often paying hundreds of dollars per month in mandatory supervision while they continue to try to pass the LCSW-C exam. A moratorium would pause the requirement to pass culturally biased exams to achieve licensure while allowing more social workers to become licensed under the BSWE.

Adjust language in the workgroup, per request by the Deaf and hard of hearing community, from "a representative of Gallaudet University" to "A social worker designated by the Maryland Association of the Deaf who is familiar with the licensing process for deaf and hard of hearing social workers." A representative from Gallaudet does not ensure that the representative is Deaf or understands the exam issue from the Deaf perspective.

SB0145

Change "The BSWE may..." to "The BSWE shall..." The BSWE has historically not addressed disparities in social work licensing and opposed temporary licensing. The shift from "may" to "shall" ensures the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) grants temporary licensure to eligible candidates.

Reinstate 2-year temporary license option for LCSW-Cs. Temporary licensure for LCSW-C is currently amended out of SB0145. The LCSW-C exam is just as biased as the LBSW and LMSW exam. It is imperative that we include LCSW-Cs as possible candidates for temporary licensure. Many are ready to advance in our field but are unable to do so because of the barrier of a bias exam.

Thank you for your consideration,
Rebecca (Becky) Davis
Scott Stafford