

**Senate Finance Committee
March 12, 2024**

**Senate Bill 794 - State Board of Social Work Examiners –
Continuing Education Programs – Approval of Authorized Sponsors
SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on SB 794, which requires the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) resume responsibility for approving authorized sponsors of continuing education programs for social workers in our state. I am a licensed school social worker who has practiced in Maryland for 33 years and I, along with NASW-Maryland's Social Workers in Schools Committee, are strongly in favor of SB 794.

The BSWE's primary responsibility is to protect the public. As our BSWE has the responsibility to license social workers, the BSWE should also maintain responsibility for assessing and authorizing providers of continuing education to ensure that those providers are qualified and providing content that is relevant to social workers in Maryland.

In Maryland, master's level social workers are required to accrue 40 continuing education units (CEUs) every two years to maintain their license as required by COMAR 10.42.06. There are two types of CEUs: Category I and Category II. Of the required 40 CEUs, a minimum of 20 must be Category I. There is almost always a cost associated with Category I continuing education.

In June 2019, I contacted the BSWE to apply on behalf of my current school social work department to become a provider of continuing education as we, at that time, were a brand new school social work department. I was completely surprised to see the link to apply to become a provider of continuing education gone, and no information on how to apply anywhere on the BSWE website. I called and spoke to a staff member who told me that they no longer would be approving continuing education providers.

On June 9, 2023, I, along with school social workers from several school districts, attended the BSWE Board meeting to request that they resume providing approval to become continuing education providers, to reduce the hardship in obtaining continuing education through the employer. Having the BSWE resume this responsibility is crucial to address the work force shortages in our profession as we face the rising mental health needs in our communities.

The BSWE's abdication of its responsibility to approve sponsors of Category I CEU activities created a huge vacuum. It left employers only two options: to apply through one of two national organizations, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) or the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Both the national ASWB and NASW approval processes are administratively onerous, time intensive, and costly (see Attachment #1). Additionally, their approval lasts for one year (NASW) or two years (ASWB), requiring potential providers to pay for, and go through the time-intensive approval process repeatedly.

My school system eventually obtained approval through the ASWB to provide one, three hour training, but that process took 11 months. The time and expense involved was a burden to our department. The delay in the approval process hindered our social workers' ability obtain their continuing education in a timely way.

The funds spent to obtain this approval should not leave our state, or be paid for by Maryland taxpayers who fund social work salaries in our government agencies, including our schools. Senate Bill 794 would be a more timely, practical, less expensive way for employers to provide Category I CEUs. The benefits of enacting SB 794 include:

- It saves money for employers, including many that are government agencies. The cost of one Category I CEU ranges from \$20-\$75.
- It saves our state government and nonprofit agencies additional money by not paying recurring fees to ASWB or NASW (up to \$1,425 per year or every other year). When the BSWE used to approve Category I providers, there was a nominal one-time fee of to become a permanent approved sponsor. There are only four school systems in Maryland that are approved as authorized sponsors of continuing education programs (see Attachment #2).
- Earning Category I CEUs at work sites is time-efficient, provides targeted topics for the employees, and provides a significant incentive for hiring and maintaining social workers.
- Organizations and individuals (including for-profit organizations) that were approved prior to May, 2019 are permitted to provide Category I CEUs, while those who did not apply prior to May, 2019, are not. SB 794 addresses this inequity.
- In the face of work force shortages for social workers, and increasing mental health needs across our state, passing SB 794 increases retention of social workers by enabling Category I CEUs to become part of their employment contract.
- Since the BSWE enforces the continuing education requirements in COMAR, including required and approved topics for continuing education, the BSWE is also best suited to approve sponsors.
- SB 794 aligns with the BSWE's mandate to protect the public and ensure licensed social workers are thoroughly trained and able to serve the public with a high level of expertise.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and support of SB 794 as we work to ensure the highest quality social work practice for the people of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Flanagan LCSW-C
NASW-MD, Social Workers in Schools Committee

Attachment #1

Below is a chart comparing the costs associated with applying to become a continuing education provider with either national organization:

| | Association of Social Work Boards | National Association of Social Workers |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Initial fee: | \$25 | \$125 |
| Approval good for: | 2 years | 1 year |
| Approval cost: | Individual course: \$125 | Workshop: \$200 |
| | Provider approval: \$500 - \$1,400 | Conference: \$325 |
| | | Symposium: \$1,250 |
| Late fee for initial approval: | | \$300 (if not received within 30 days of event) |
| Late fee for renewal: | \$100 (if not received within 10 days of approval expiration date) | |
| Cost for use of seal: | | One time use: \$100 |
| | | Annual use: \$300 |
| Renewal cost: | \$600-\$1500, depending on number or courses | same as original cost |
| Review fee: | \$50, after 3 renewals | |
| Reinstatement fee: | \$600 (plus \$100 late fee if requested after approval expiration date) | |
| Appeal fee: | \$900 | |
| Timelines for approval: | 6 weeks for pre-application approval; then 3 months (or longer) for course approval | Not noted, but must submit application 30 days minimum before event |

Retrieved 2/18/2024 from:

<https://www.aswb.org/licenses/ace-approved-continuing-education/ace-approval-types/>

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Careers/CE-Approval-Program/Apply>

Attachment #2

Here is the list of County School Systems that do and do not have approval to provide Category I continuing education units.

| Approved Providers | Not |
|--|---|
| Anne Arundel County Public School System | Allegany County Public School System |
| Baltimore County Public School System | Baltimore City Public School System |
| Frederick County Public School System | Calvert County Public School System |
| Montgomery County Public School System | Caroline County Public School System |
| Washington County Public School System | Carroll County Public School System |
| | Cecil County Public School System |
| | Charles County Public School System |
| | Dorchester County Public School System |
| | Garrett County Public School System |
| | Harford County Public School System |
| | Howard County Public School System |
| | Kent County Public School System |
| | Prince George’s County Public School System |
| | Queen Anne’s County Public School System |
| | St. Mary’s County Public School System |
| | Somerset County Public School System |
| | Talbot County Public School System |
| | Wicomico County Public School System |
| | Worcester County Public School System |

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