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House Bill 0034- Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

UNFAVORABLE

I am a Professor of Social Work at Catholic University and a resident of Maryland. I am writing in opposition HB0034, which would enter Maryland into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. While I support the spirit of the Compact, which offers social workers great portability, potentially benefitting them and clients, passing this bill now would undermine legislation passed during last year's session.

In the 2023 legislative session, SB0871 was passed into law, establishing a workgroup of a diverse group of social workers and other stakeholders to examine important questions about the current national examinations that are required for social work licensure in Maryland in the context of recent data that shows alarming racial, age, and native language disparities in passing rates. The data, released by the organization who creates and administers the national exam, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), shows that from 2011-2021, white test-takers in Maryland passed the Masters level exam at a first-time rate of 93%, while Black test-takers passed at 56% rate and Hispanic/Latinos at a 79% rate. Clinical exam pass rates are similar, with rates of 89%, 54%, and 66% respectively. The data also showed that older test-takers are passing at significantly lower rates than younger ones and that non-native English speakers are passing less often than native speakers.

The workgroup is currently engaged in their information gathering process and has a deadline of December 31, 2024 to deliver their report and recommendations. The social work licensing compact bill is directly related to the tasks of the workgroup, since the current language of the compact requires social workers who want to take advantage of reciprocity to have passed a "qualifying national exam" OR "substantial equivalency". Since there are no current alternatives to the ASWB exam that is currently used, this language may further entrench these exams before the workgroup has a chance to make their recommendations.

At this moment, passing HB0034 in the current session undermines the process of the workgroup and potentially limits the purpose and utility of their report and recommendations. Instead of passing HB0034, I ask that the issue of the Social Work Licensure Compact be added to the workgroup's agenda and recommendations about the Compact be included in their report. This will allow the General Assembly to have the necessary information required to pass thoughtful legislation regarding the use of the national exams as a requirement for social work licensure and the Interstate Compact.

Last year, you assembled a workgroup to make sure that you were not rushing into a hasty and potentially harmful decision. I ask that you follow your own lead regarding HB0034. There is no urgent need to enter the Compact immediately. While the excellent workgroup is in place, you have the opportunity to make use of their efforts and expertise and ensure that you are making the best decisions for the social work workforce in Maryland and for Maryland citizens.