

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1119
Health

(Delegate Cullison)

Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scopes of Practice

This bill alters (1) the scope of practice for licensed social workers in the State; (2) the purpose of the Social Workers Act; and (3) the definition of “practice social work.” The bill specifies that a license issued by the State Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) authorizes the licensee to practice social work within the scope of the specific license category and consistent with the education, training, and supervised experience of the licensee. A licensed bachelor social worker (LBSW), licensed master social worker (LMSW), or a licensed certified social worker (LCSW) may engage in independent practice only as authorized by the board. The bill also makes conforming changes.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: BSWE can handle any administrative changes with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary/Current Law: Generally, an individual must be licensed by BSWE to practice social work in the State. In Maryland, there are four social work license categories, distinguished by specific education and/or training requirements, including LBSW; LMSW; LCSW (no longer issued, but renewed); and licensed certified social worker-clinical (LCSW-C). Chapters 9 and 10 of 2025 entered Maryland into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.

Under current law, to obtain a license, an applicant must (1) submit a written application on a board-prescribed form; (2) be at least 18 years old; (3) be of good moral character; (4) successfully pass required examinations pertinent to the license sought; (5) pay any applicable fees; (6) complete a criminal history records check; and (7) if required, complete a mental or physical examination by a board-appointed health care practitioner. Each license expires every two years, after which the licensee must pay a renewal fee, submit a renewal application, submit satisfactory evidence of compliance with any continuing education requirements, and otherwise be entitled to be licensed.

Maryland Social Workers Act

Under current law, the purpose of the Maryland Social Workers Act is to protect the public by (1) setting minimum qualifications, education, training, and experience standards for the licensing of individuals to practice social work and (2) promoting and maintaining high professional standards for the practice of social work.

The bill specifies that the purpose of the Maryland Social Workers Act is to ensure that individuals and communities in the State receive competent, ethical, and effective social work services by:

- establishing clear standards of education, supervised experience, and professional preparation for each category of social work licensure;
- promoting standards and maintaining high professional standards for the practice of social work across clinical, community, organizational, administrative, and policy-oriented areas; and
- ensuring ethical, accountable, and qualified practice by requiring social workers to be prepared, licensed, and engaged in ongoing professional development.

Practice Social Work

Under current law, “practice social work” means to apply the theories, knowledge, procedures, methods, or ethics derived from receiving a baccalaureate or master’s degree from a program in social work that is accredited by or a candidate for accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education, or an equivalent organization, to restore or enhance social functioning of individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, or communities through assessment; planning; intervention; evaluation of intervention plans; case management; information and referral; counseling that does not include the diagnosis or treatment of behavioral health disorders; advocacy; consultation; education; research; community organization; development, implementation, and administration of policies, programs, and activities; or supervision of other social workers as set forth in regulations. “Practice social work” includes (1) counseling for alcohol and drug use and addictive behavior and (2) using technology as set forth in regulations.

The bill specifies that “practice social work” means to apply social work knowledge, skills, values, and ethics to enhance or restore the biopsychosocial functioning, well-being, and conditions of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. “Practice social work” includes, as appropriate to the education, training, and license category of the licensee:

- psychosocial assessment and evaluation;
- case management, care coordination, and service planning;
- counseling, support, and problem-solving interventions;
- crisis intervention and safety planning;
- consultation and interdisciplinary collaboration;
- information and referral;
- advocacy on behalf of individuals, families, and communities;
- program development, administration, policy analysis, and community organization;
- supervision and training of other social workers;
- research, evaluation, and the application of evidence-informed practice;
- the use of telehealth, electronic practice, and other technologies consistent with professional standards and regulations adopted by the board; and
- clinical assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and psychotherapy performed by an LCSW-C.

Categories of Social Work Licensure

Licensed Bachelor Social Worker: Under current law, an LBSW must have a bachelor’s degree in social work from an accredited social work program. Generally, an LBSW must practice social work under the supervision of another social worker, unless given approval to engage in independent practice.

Under current law, an LBSW may not: (1) engage in independent practice, as specified; (2) make a clinical diagnosis of a behavioral health or emotional disorder; (3) provide psychotherapy; or (4) engage in private practice.

The bill removes these provisions and instead specifies that an LBSW may: (1) perform generalist social work functions, including psychosocial assessment, case management, service planning, resource referral, client advocacy, and supportive counseling; (2) conduct social histories, home studies, and basic psychosocial evaluations; and (3) engage in community organization, outreach, and program support. An LBSW may not: (1) diagnose a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder; (2) provide psychotherapy; (3) provide clinical treatment; or (4) engage in independent practice, except as approved by the board.

Licensed Master Social Worker: Under current law, an LMSW must have, or be a candidate for, a master's degree in social work from an accredited social work program. Generally, an LMSW must practice social work under the supervision of another social worker, unless given approval to engage in independent practice.

Under current law, for a master social worker, "practice social work" also includes the supervision of other social workers, as specified, and under the supervision of a LCSW-C: (1) formulating a diagnosis; (2) treatment of biopsychosocial conditions; and (3) treatment of behavioral health disorders, including substance use disorders, addictive disorders, and mental disorders, and the provision of psychotherapy. An LMSW may not (1) engage in independent practice unless approved by the board; (2) treat behavioral health or emotional disorders or provide psychotherapy without the supervision of an LCSW-C; (3) diagnose a behavioral health disorder without the supervision of an LCSW-C; or (4) engage in private practice.

The bill removes these provisions and instead specifies that an LMSW may: (1) perform the functions of a LBSW; (2) conduct psychosocial assessments, develop treatment plans, and provide counseling, psychotherapy, or other clinical services under the supervision of a LCSW-C; (3) engage in case management, care coordination, crisis intervention, and interdisciplinary collaboration; and (4) provide administrative, policy, research, or community practice services consistent with graduate-level training. An LMSW may not: (1) practice clinical social work independently; (2) diagnose a mental, emotional, behavioral, or addictive disorder without the supervision of a LCSW-C; or (3) engage in the independent practice of social work, except as approved by the board.

Licensed Certified Social Worker: Under current law, an LCSW must have a master's degree in social work from an accredited social work program and provide documentation of having completed two years of specified supervised experience. LCSW licenses are no longer issued but are renewed by BSWE.

Under current law, for an LCSW "practice social work" includes: the supervision of other social workers and under the supervision of a LCSW-C: (1) formulating a diagnosis; (2) treatment of biopsychosocial conditions; and (3) treatment of behavioral health disorders, including substance use disorders, addictive disorders, and mental disorders, and the provision of psychotherapy. An LCSW may not: (1) treat behavioral health or emotional disorders or provide psychotherapy without the supervision of an LCSW-C; (2) diagnose a mental disorder without the supervision of an LCSW-C; or (3) engage in private practice.

The bill removes these provisions.

Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical: Under current law, an LCSW-C must have a master's degree in social work from an accredited social work program and documentation of 12 academic credits in clinical course work, as specified. An LCSW-C must also provide documentation of having completed two years as a licensee with specified supervised experience of face-to-face client contact, formulation of a diagnostic impression, and treatment of mental disorders and other conditions and the provision of psychotherapy.

Under current law, for an LCSW-C “practice social work” includes: (1) supervision of other social workers; (2) evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of biopsychosocial conditions, mental and emotional conditions and impairments, and behavioral health disorders, including substance use disorders, addictive disorders, and mental disorders, and the provision of psychotherapy; (3) petitioning for emergency evaluation; and (4) the provision of psychotherapy.

The bill removes these provisions and instead specifies that an LCSW-C may: (1) independently practice clinical social work; (2) diagnose and treat mental, emotional, behavioral, or addictive disorders; (3) provide psychotherapy and other therapeutic interventions; (4) conduct advanced psychosocial assessments, treatment, planning, and evaluation; and (5) provide clinical supervision in accordance with board regulations.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 874 (Senator M. Washington) - Finance.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Health; Department of Legislative Services

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