

**Testimony before Education, Health, and Government Affairs Committee**

**\*\*Support\*\***

**SB 245 – ‘Health Occupations – Social Workers – Scope of Practice, Supervision, and Application Decision Appeal Process.’**

**January 30, 2020**

Maryland’s Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW – MD), which represents professional social workers across the state, supports House Bill 245, “Health Occupations – Social Workers – Scope of Practice, Supervision, and Application Decision Appeal Process.”

This bill will remedy some unintended consequences of a social work licensing bill passed three years ago, and also offer an appeals process when candidates are denied eligibility for the advanced clinical license. Along with the opportunity for appeal, the bill clarifies that social workers may provide drug and alcohol counseling and offers a sensible pathway to independent practice for experienced social workers.

It is well known that we have an addiction crisis in our state. We need to have “all hands, on deck” when serving those who are suffering from the misuse of drugs and alcohol. Not all services require making a medical diagnosis and providing psychotherapy, There are many other service modalities which are important in this work. Just as one can become a certified substance abuse counselor with only an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, social workers with bachelor and master’s degrees also have a role in serving this clientele. This bill will make this distinction clear.

The 2017 amendments to the social work practice act provided an end of “forever supervision” of LBSW and LMSW social workers and created an Independent Practice status. This bill will clarify the grandfathering provision of that status which has been complicated through regulations. It will also provide the supervisors needed in the workforce for the next generation of LBSW and LMSW social workers.

The Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) has the weighty responsibility of protecting Maryland residents, licensing social work practitioners, and responding to complaints of unethical and/or irresponsible behavior. The Licensed Certified Social Work – Clinical license is the highest level of clinical licensure and the BSWE staff are charged with the responsibility of determining eligibility. When social workers apply, there are criteria that must be met, including sufficient relevant coursework, clinical work experience, and supervision from an advanced practitioner.

While we recognize the substantial work of the BSWE and respect its mission of protecting the community, the decisions made by the staff have significant ramifications for a social worker’s career. For some, an advanced license is a requirement of their employer and their very livelihood is at stake. For others, it’s a necessary credential for advancing their career.

A colleague reported that she was turned down for the advanced licensure because the BSWE didn’t regard the clinical coursework completed at Columbia University as sufficient for their standards. Once denied, she was informed of no opportunity to appeal. There are other similar stories from social workers who report being told their setting – for example, an in-patient psychiatric hospital - isn’t “clinical” despite that social worker providing clinical services to their clients daily, or the supervision they’ve received isn’t quite right. One young social worker eager to excel in her profession has run into any number of obstacles since her initial application made during the summer, “I’m worried my application is going to be rejected, and not knowing what to do then.”

The appeals process articulated in SB245 will offer a small step for applicants "to do then" - simply an opportunity to submit additional information or to request an informal hearing before the board, in short, an opportunity to be heard. When people's livelihood is on the line, surely this isn't too much to offer.

Social workers spend their careers advocating on behalf of others; sometimes we overlook doing the same for ourselves. We ask that you give a favorable report to HB245.

Respectfully,

Judith Schagrin, LCSW-C  
Chairperson, Legislative Committee