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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 527
Health Occupations – Social Workers – Scope of Practice, Supervision and Application
Decision Appeal Process.**

Good afternoon, Chairman Pendergrass, Vice Chairman Peña-Melnyk and honorable members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present HB 527, **Health Occupations – Social Workers – Scope of Practice, Supervision and Application Decision Appeal Process.**

This bill would facilitate increasing the numbers of mental health providers, specifically licensed social workers, by providing additional supervisors to support training and professional development of others and would correct an omission in the 2017 statute in order to allow all levels of licensed social workers to provide drug and addiction counseling. These changes will support our efforts to deliver the services that our residents are seeking, needs that are currently largely unmet.

Our governor has declared the opioid crisis a state emergency. This bill would clarify some confusion in statute about who can provide counseling for alcohol and drug use and other addictive behaviors and expand the available workforce. All levels of licensed social workers are trained to provide this kind of counseling and this bill states that explicitly. It does not expand any scope of practice; “diagnosis and treatment” of these disorders, which are not a part of the training, are not included in these provisions.

In 2017 we passed HB 1183, Board of Social Work Examiners - Revisions that created the status of Licensed Bachelor Social Worker (LBSW) and Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) independent practitioners. It was intended that those who had practiced successfully for 10 years or more (licensed before 2008) should be grandfathered and provided an expedited path to this status due to their level of experience. Unfortunately, the Board’s regulations promulgated in 2019 actually made it more difficult for these seasoned practitioners to achieve this status, meaning that they would continue to be required to be supervised. This bill will remove the barriers for these individuals and make their application process the same as those hired after 2008.

One of the responsibilities that independent practitioners can assume is that of supervisor who supports those working toward initial and higher levels of licensure. These supervisors are needed to grow this workforce. Beginning in January 2021 Board regulations will require that all supervisors be Board approved after completing a Board process. However, under current regulations applying to become a Board approved supervisor is burdensome and frankly a bit arbitrary. Under HB 527, an independent practitioner will be automatically approved upon

application if they have worked successfully for at least 5 years as a licensed social worker and meet the supervisor education requirements.

Lastly, the bill defines an appeal process for an applicant who has been denied the opportunity to take the social work advanced licensing examinations. Under the current regulations, there is an appeal process for someone who has been denied licensure, but not for being denied the opportunity to advance in their profession. It is my understanding that applicants are being denied this opportunity, the chance to take the examinations required for advancement with questionable rationales.

There is always the question of what belongs in regulations and what belongs in statute and I believe that the Board of Examiners will raise this issue. I would suggest that if we as a legislature believes that it is in the best interest of our residents to codify a particular policy or practice, it should be in statute. The confusion over the intentions of the 2017 bill is an example of that need.

In 2017, we acknowledged the expertise and professional skills of social workers by updating the licensing law. The implementation has resulted in some issues, which this bill seeks to resolve. Resolution is important if we are going to build and sustain this workforce that is essential to our residents. For this reason, I respectfully request a favorable report.