

PRO BONO

# COUNSELING PROJECT

Testimony Concerning HB527

Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scope of Practice, Supervision, and Application Decision Appeal Process  
Submitted to the Health and Government Operations Committee  
Thursday, February 6, 2020

Position: Support

The Pro Bono Counseling Project (PBCP) strongly supports HB527, which would make necessary changes to the social work licensing law. This bill clarifies the scope of practice of social workers at all licensure levels to include substance use counseling, clarifies the intent of a 2017 law regarding independent practice licensure, streamlines the process for experienced social workers to become supervisors, and creates an appeal mechanism for social work licensure candidates who are denied the opportunity to sit for the licensure exam.

In 1992, PBCP was founded by a social worker, in collaboration with the professional bodies of each of the mental health disciplines, to expand access to mental health care to Marylanders with limited resources. Today, PBCP is a network of over 800 licensed mental health providers (41% of whom are social workers), who in 2019 collectively donated 10,468 hours of quality mental health care to 3,209 Marylanders who otherwise would not have had access to counseling.

SB245 addresses a number of aspects of social work licensure that will ultimately result in greater access to social work services for Maryland's most vulnerable residents.

Clarifying that all social work license levels may practice substance use counseling ensures that all consumers, social workers, and those that employ social workers know that substance use counseling is within the scope of social work practice.

This bill also allows social workers with at least 5 years of practice experience, and who have completed board approved continuing education in supervision, to become supervisors of other social workers. This does not compromise the number of years of practice required to become a supervisor; rather, it allows those with extensive social work experience to become supervisors without waiting an additional 18-24 months after achieving independent practice status. This will address a crucial workforce shortage of board approved supervisors for social workers.

Lastly, HB527 creates an appeal mechanism for social work licensure candidates who have been denied the opportunity to sit for the licensure exam by the Board of Social Work Examiners. An appeal mechanism provides due process for social work candidates who have submitted themselves to the licensure process. An appeals process will allow for resolution when there is a discrepancy between the Board of Social Work Examiners decision on the candidate's application and the candidate's understanding of their eligibility.

Therefore, we urge you to vote in favor of HB527.

Submitted By: Amy R. Greensfelder, LMSW  
Executive Director