

**Written Testimony from Anthony Estreet, Ph.D., LCSW-C, LCADC
NASW-MD Board President
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February 6, 2020

Re: House Bill 527 Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scope of Practice, Supervision, and Application Decision Appeal Process

To Whom It May Concern,

Over the course of my tenure as NASW-MD president, I have worked with the staff and board to meet and exceed the expectations of our members and social workers across the state. Over the past year there has been increasing concern among social workers regarding the licensing practices of the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE), with focus on the licensure application process for both the generalist and clinical licensees. Many of those concerned describe a licensing process that is unclear and demonstrates inconsistent decision-making by the staff at the BSWE.

There are numerous examples of complaints from social workers regarding the board processes, I would very much like to see the process for licensure at all levels more transparent and clearer for those social workers that have to engage in the process. Many of the complaints that we receive speak to a process that is ambiguous and unresponsive to the concerns of Maryland social workers. Moreover, many of those who express their concerns to NASW-MD, do so because they are intimidated or don't want to experience retaliation (not granted licensure or ability to take licensing exam) from the board by "rocking the boat". While many of those concerns may be unfounded, it speaks to the fear that social workers experience when interacting with the board. It is the belief of NASW-MD that social workers should be able to express their concerns with any of the board processes and receive an adequate and timely response.

The major charge for BSWE is to protect the public that we serve. While I understand this is a difficult task and the board is responsible for making some tough decisions, it is difficult to see how some of those decisions related to licensing applications help the public. Instead, they appear to penalize those social workers who are attempting to follow the regulations established by BSWE even when they are unclear. The current process as it stands has issues, NASW-MD staff and board have received numerous concerns and other examples of behaviors demonstrated by BSWE staff which are quite frankly disturbing from a state agency and employee. The growing concern is that in cases such as with the application process, there is no direct appeal process (that is easily found) for the applicant to follow after a staff person makes a decision. Moreover, the decision-making process from our inquiry seems dependent on which staff person at BSWE reviews the application.

These complaints highlight a growing need for NASW-MD to advocate and respond in a way that helps address these concerns, and NASW-MD is now advocating through the legislative process for the BSWE to establish an appeals process if an applicant is denied the opportunity to take the social work licensing examination. Moreover, NASW-MD seeks to develop a more collaborative partnership with the leadership from the BSWE to meet and discuss how we can work together to improve this process for all Maryland Social Workers.

****Please support HB 527****

If you have any questions, I can be reached at anthony.estreet@morgan.edu



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