

Testimony in Favor of SB0167

Thank you, Senator West and all the members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, for addressing this critical issue and therefore recognizing the vital role of social work, especially in times of crisis. The University of Maryland, School of Social Work appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of SB 0167, which amends the Maryland Social Work Licensing Statute by adding a Temporary License to Practice Social Work. We graduate on average 450 graduate MSWs each year and we represent an extensive, skilled, and dedicated workforce of social workers in Maryland.

One requirement for social work licensing is the passing of a nationally administered test for each of the social work licenses (LBSW, LMSW, LCSW, LCSW-C.) These tests are offered through the Association of Social Work Boards and are administered in person at specific testing centers. An unintentional barrier created by the measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19 was the limited offering of these tests. In March, we began to hear from numerous alumni and graduating students of their concern that they were unable to accept employment or advance to supervisory positions because there were such limited offerings of the licensing tests. At such critical times, we as a profession are unable to fully respond to the needs of Maryland's citizens and are in need of the remedy offered in SB 167.

This change would allow the BSWE to issue a temporary license to an applicant who meets all other requirements, and are just waiting for the opportunity to sit for an exam. We all agree that we have an interest in ensuring that the public receive services from individuals with specialized education, practice, and skill. We can attest to the rigor of social work academic classes with multiple assignments and exams and two year-long field practicums which result in graduates with valuable practice experience and skills. Anyone working under the temporary LBSW or LMSW license is already required to work under the supervision of an experience social worker. Further, a candidate who is eligible to sit for the LCSW or LCSW-C test has already worked in a social work position a minimum of two years under the supervision of an experienced social worker. Many other professional boards have provided licensing flexibility to respond in times of crisis and we support this legislative option for social work professionals.

These barriers hurt recent and soon-to-be graduates in their ability to find employment, and also burdens the overwhelmed infrastructure of our public health crisis response. Social Workers are essential to a comprehensive response and offer a unique skill set that can help to mitigate disparities, often experienced by underserved communities, who are often impacted to a greater degree by public health crises. Employers struggle to hire social workers and promote staff to supervisory positions because the opportunities to sit for the licensing exam are so limited. This licensing obstacle limits new graduates' career options, salary expectations, and long-term livelihoods. More importantly, it reduces the number energized social workers eligible and skilled to immediately contribute to the workforce in Maryland in a time of crisis.

Respectfully submitted by

Judy L. Postmus, Ph.D., ACSW, Dean & Professor

Dawn Shafer, LCSW-C, Associate Dean for Student Affairs

University of Maryland School of Social Work