

January 22, 2021

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Please accept my written testimony on behalf of Senate Bill 167-State Board of Social Work Examiners-Temporary License to Practice Social Work. I currently serve as the President of The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) which is a statewide network of private agencies serving at-risk children and youth. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health and medical needs. We operate group homes, treatment foster care programs and independent living programs, primarily serving the foster care population as well as a juvenile services population. Additionally, I am the President/CEO of Hearts and Homes for Youth, a Maryland based non-profit, and am a board certified licensed social worker supervisor in Maryland and an LICSW in Washington, DC.

Private providers' experienced significant obstacles prior to COVID related to hiring social workers due to an identified national shortage and this challenge has become more compounded as a result of the pandemic. The delay in graduates' ability to sit for their exam and obtain licensure considerably impedes employer's capacity to offer employment subsequently hindering clinical services that our youth, families and communities require. Due to the current unprecedented hindrances, it took our agency 10 months to fill a social worker position in one of our group homes. The youth and families that many of us serve are involved in the child welfare system and the need for trauma informed therapeutic services is dire given the unintended impact on mental health due to COVID and is only expected to surge. Allowing this bill to pass provides an opportunity to amend the current statutes to meet the rising needs of our community.

I have been a licensed social worker for 15 years and have worked in child welfare for over 10 years and the state of our current mental health needs for our most vulnerable populations far exceeds anything I have ever witnessed. I strongly advocate for modifications to current practices be considered to align with our existing barriers for the mental well-being and safety of our youth, families and community.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chloe Pérez, LCSW-C, LICSW
President/CEO