



February 3, 2022

House Bill 173

**State Board of Social Work Examiners – Temporary License to Practice Social Work
House Health and Government Operations Committee**

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. 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.

If passed, House Bill 173 would authorize the State Board of Social Work Examiners to issue a temporary license to an applicant who, except for passing the required examination, has otherwise completed the appropriate education and experience required for a license to practice bachelor social work or master social work. The board may issue a temporary license if a required examination is unavailable to an applicant for a period of at least seven days. A temporary license is valid until 90 days after the examination becomes readily available to the applicant. A temporary license authorizes the holder to practice bachelor social work or master social work in the State only under the supervision of a board-approved supervisor while the temporary license is effective.

Private providers experienced significant obstacles prior to COVID-19 as it pertained 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 a graduate's ability to sit for their exam to obtain their 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 many agencies over 10 months to fill social worker positions in some group homes over the past two-years.

Pandemic-related stress has affected everyone, including individuals in the helping professions. Designated as essential workers, social workers have continued reporting to work. The COVID crisis can exacerbate burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma, which affect social workers even in non-pandemic times.

As worker challenges continue, the state of our current mental health needs as it pertains to caring for our most vulnerable populations far exceeds anything MARFY members have ever witnessed. We 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 communities. Allowing this bill to pass would provide an opportunity to amend the current statutes to meet the rising needs of our community.

It is for these reasons we politely ask for a favorable report on House Bill 173.



Maryland Association of
Resources for Families & Youth