

Emanuel Wilkerson's Testimony on Friday, March 10 for in favor of  
SB0871: Social Workers - Licensure Examinations - Moratorium and Workgroup  
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Hello, thank you for reading my written testimony in favor of Bills SB0871 and SB0872.

Hello everyone. My name is Emanuel Wilkerson. I am a 25-year-old African American male unlicensed social worker. After 6 years of investing my time and money in higher education, I became the first in my family to attain a bachelor's and master's degree in social work. So today I will talk about the ASWB experience and I am in favor of these bills by sharing my personal story.

The ASWB has negatively impacted my life and stopped my career before it could even begin. I entered social work because I grew up seeing adults with degrees and licenses prove time and time again how ineffective they were at helping people in my community. I grew up with a speech impediment but still chose a speaking profession because my words, empathy, creativity, and ability to understand people called me to do great things in this field. I knew what it felt like to be in environments where no one shares your skin color and to be the victim of injustice.

So since the end of 2021, I studied for the exam while working full-time in my master's program. I utilized everything possible to achieve a passing score by studying for many hours a day for nearly a year. I spent thousands on test prep books, practice exams from their website that you have to re-purchase every time you retake it, and on the exam fee itself. I drained nearly all of my savings in the licensure process.

All of this resulted in me failing the exams 3 times and losing several job offers with agencies looking to hire me post-grad school. I was out unemployed for months following graduation. I was unable to support myself financially. For 2 years now my father has been in the hospital from a stroke and I am unable to support my mother with the hospital bills. This degree I invested 6 years of my life is useless due to the test.

I could have chosen some other field like communication or psychology and be allowed to do many human services jobs in MD, but I specifically chose social work to make a real difference for marginalized people. Now I am not allowed to work with people at all because I cannot pass a racially biased examination. I am being punished for wanting to help my community. There are many, many stories like mine since about half of Black MD social work graduates are unable to pass this exam on the first try, versus over 90% of white social work graduates.

Now I know what some of you are thinking "If you failed the test then you are not meeting the standards of the social work profession. That's what the exam is for." But I ask whose standard am I not meeting? Who makes those scenario questions and decides the answers on the exam? Social work is a varied and diverse field of practice that helps human beings who are

equally varied and diverse. No exam will ever reflect that. No social worker treats their practice the same if you did treat them the same then you are not “meeting the client where they’re at”.

To conclude

The social work profession says it wants people like me - people of color and people with lived experience, but it utilizes a licensing exam that has a clear bias against people like me. If anyone disagrees with me, I ask you to explain those numbers on ASWBs data reports. If you are able to. To see some social workers want to keep the exam where it stands even after the data shows clear gaps in representation is laughable and hypocritical to all CSWE 9. Please support these bills Mary Washington is advocating for because my life is suffering for no reason.

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