

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am a Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C). I am urging you to support SB 0872 and SB0871 with an amendment that would make the exam continue to be available to applicants on an optional basis.

These bills provide temporary licensing and a moratorium on using exams in the licensing process for social workers. States across the country are grappling with the profoundly discriminatory impact of biased licensing exams that have deprived Maryland of more than 1200 committed and competent mental health providers, specifically those of color, older, or foreign language speakers.

Failing the test puts an undue financial and personal burden on these skilled professionals. Many have spent thousands of dollars in their attempts to pass, while working in lower income jobs because of the lack of a license.

While the exams clearly create undue barriers to licensure disproportionately affecting applicants of color, in over 40 years of exam history, there is no evidence that the exam effectively assesses quality or safety of social work practice.

These two bills allow otherwise qualified social workers to enter and advance practice, while the State develops an alternative practice-based assessment for licensing.

Neither of these bills ends social work licensure. Even without exams, there are substantial requirements for licensure, including graduation from a nationally accredited school—which includes hundreds of supervised hours of fieldwork, thousands of hours of supervised practice, and a background check. This is a sufficient baseline to ensure that social workers are prepared to practice safely and equitably.

As a white social worker, I passed the exam on the first go-round. I believe it was my race that privileged me in regard to the exam and that this does not make me a “better” social worker. My former colleague who is African American did not pass the exam on the first go-round. However, I believe she was and still is a much more competent and skilled Social Worker than I am.

Most importantly, the exams deny Marylanders the help they deserve, especially in communities of color where the need is growing and where cultural connection to clients is essential. Over a thousand social workers are missing from Maryland’s workforce. If all test-takers passed at the same rate as white test-takers from 2011 to 2021, we would have 1227 more licensed social workers in Maryland (see: [Association of Social Work Boards exam pass rates by state/province](#)).

We cannot continue to allow this exam to keep competent, compassionate social workers from serving those in need. The alarming outcome disparities, along with ongoing issues of validity, prove that the exams are needlessly perpetuating inequality,

keeping social workers from making a living and advancing in their profession and keeping the community from getting vital services.

It is for all of these reasons that I urge you to pass SB 0872 and SB0871 with an amendment that would make the exam continue to be available to applicants on an optional basis.

Sincerely,

Lynda Davis, LCSW-C  
Linthicum, MD