



SB 872

State Board of Social Work Examiners – Temporary License to Practice Social Work

Senate Finance Committee

March 10, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 872, which authorizes the State Board of Social Work Examiners to issue a temporary license to practice master social work or certified social work-clinical to an applicant, who, expect for passing the required exam, has met the educational and experience requirements for licensure.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors. As the largest human service provider in Maryland we employ hundreds of social workers, and we recognize the importance of having a robust and diverse workforce.

Behavioral health providers, like Catholic Charities, have experienced a significant and unprecedented workforce crisis. The obstacles to hire social workers due to a national shortage were significant prior to 2020, and this challenge became even more compounded as a result of the pandemic. Unfortunately, thousands of social workers who have completed their degree programs are missing from the Maryland workforce due to the licensure examination process. The reduction in our state's social work capacity due to struggles with the licensure exam subsequently hinders clinical services to our youth, families and communities. Thus, granting social workers temporarily licensure while the state undergoes the critical work necessary to develop an alternative assessment is paramount in maintaining and building our workforce.

We want a workforce that is representative of the Marylanders we serve in our programs and the ability to uplift lived experience as a critically valuable expertise: two goals that are stifled by the current social work licensure exams. There are massive and alarming racial disparities in the passage rate of the LMSW and LCSW-C licensure exams, meaning thousands of social workers are left out the workforce who – besides passing a biased exam – have all the experience, training, and skills needed to practice social work. Additionally, the racial disparities in passage means – as an agency – we struggle to find social workers who share the same identities as the families and individuals we serve, which is a massive disservice to our clients, communities, and our state. For instance, we have long struggled to hire Spanish-speaking social workers at the Esperanza Center, and the disparities in exam passage for who test takers whose first language isn't English directly contribute to this challenge.

SB 872 allows social workers to begin practicing after graduating from accredited programs, expanding our workforce while the state reviews the current licensure examination process. SB 872 recognizes that agencies, the social work profession, and Maryland overall benefits when we can create a more diverse network of social workers. Issuing temporarily licenses to social workers is a critical step in the effort to develop a social work assessment that does not perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

For the reasons listed above, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 872.

Submitted By: Lisa Klingenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy