

From the Desk of:

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Dear Members of the Committee,

I have been a volunteer and consultant for ASWB for 15 years. I was an Item Writer for the ASWB Clinical exam, served on the Exam Committee and chaired that Committee (whose task is to review & approve the questions for the exam), and I am now a Consultant who edits items submitted by writers for the Exam. As a Black woman, I can attest to the rigorous process that goes into ensuring items on the exam are free from bias toward or against any group. Our writers and the committee come from a wide array of backgrounds, we screen the items thoroughly, and the items are “pre-tested” on the exam (as non-scored items) and then we review their psychometric data before placing them on a scored exam. This process allows us to delete items showing any type of bias against minority test takers, a particular gender, or against low scorers. We only use items that show good psychometrics according to parameters that allow for fairness.

ASWB voluntarily released the test data in an attempt to be transparent. Yes, the disparities are glaring and problematic. It sheds light on more work that needs to be done and ASWB is committed to doing what it takes to close those gaps. It is important to know that the test data was taken before ASWB moved from a 4-option multiple choice test to a 3-option multiple choice test. I strongly believe that the new format lends itself to items that are cleaner, clearer to read, concise, and help examiners choose the right answer for what’s being tested, regardless of background.

It is also important to note that school data was released. The passing rates of students of several Universities and Schools of Social work in Maryland showed disparities among their graduates of color not being properly prepared to take the exam as compared to their white counterparts. What does this tell us? This means that the disparities existed long before a candidate sat to take the exam. Several systems have failed many minority test-takers probably before they even entered Kindergarten. The ASWB data release shines light on the fact that persons of color have been disenfranchised on many fronts for far too long in this country.

I am privy to several efforts that ASWB is taking to ensure a fair exam. Those include, but are not limited to: switching to a 3-option multiple choice exam, providing free Exam Prep/Practice Exam materials and a host of other resources to test candidates, a plan to discount the fee for re-taking exam (the cost of the exam can be a barrier for many candidates), consideration of alternative options for people who just barely fail (with 1-2 points of passing), creation of a Resource Suite now available to Educators- books, exam prep materials, etc., creation of an Exam Prep app, creation of the Social Work Workforce Coalition- getting input and ideas from leaders in social work organizations, and formation of Community input sessions where social workers are asked to give input and ideas about improving the exam. The fact is, we need time to strengthen the Exam so that we can eliminate disparities and ensure that the exam does what it is supposed to do- provide protection to the public, professionalize the social work profession, and ensure minimum competency for those wishing to call themselves Social Workers.

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A grave danger and risk will exist if we “open the floodgates” and allow anyone into our profession without demonstrating competence. Not everyone is or can be a social worker. We possess certain knowledge, skills, and abilities that allow us to work with and help vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, persons struggling with addition and/or trauma, and those with mental health issues.

Imagine taking your child to undergo surgery and none of the physicians or surgical staff had to pass an exam in order to operate on your child? Can you imagine the danger and legal ramifications? If these Bills pass, our state regulatory board will see hundreds of thousands of lawsuits against people who are calling themselves social workers, but who are engaging in unsafe and unethical conduct because they were not weeded out of the profession. We must have gatekeeping. Our efforts need to go into giving ASWB the time, resources, and expectations needed to be those gatekeepers. We should not be hasty and make a poor choice for our state based off of a data release that tells many stories. Let’s wait for several data releases over the next 3-5 years and go from there. Please reject SB 871 and SB872

Thank you,



Bynia Reed, LCSW-C