



Office of the President

**Morgan State University Testimony
Dr. David Wilson, President**

Senate Bill 871 (*Senator Washington*)
Social Workers - Licensure Examinations - Moratorium and Workgroup
Committee: Finance Committee
March 10, 2023

Favorable

Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Finance Committee. We, at Morgan, thank you for the opportunity to share our position on Senate Bill 871. The summary of the Bill states the following: *Altering the licensure examination requirements for social workers; and requiring the Maryland Department of Health to establish a workgroup to identify alternatives to examination requirements for a master social worker license, a certified social worker license, or a certified social worker-clinical license and develop recommendations for a certain assessment method to replace a certain examination requirement.*

Morgan State University is the premier public urban research university in Maryland, known for its excellence in teaching, intensive research, effective public service and community engagement. Morgan prepares diverse and competitive graduates for success in a global interdependent society.

Morgan State supports this bill because it addresses the bias exhibited in the social work licensing exam.

Given the increased need for social work professionals and to address issues of equity in the labor force, Morgan State University calls upon the state legislature and licensing board to implement the following action steps to determine an equitable solution to the disparate pass rates among Black and African American test takers.

- Declare a 2-year moratorium on the administration of the ASWB exam to examine the demographic and psychometric properties of the test associated with the disparities in pass rates;
- Issue Temporary Licenses during the 2-year moratorium period

- Increase access to all examination preparation resources by offering material at low to no cost;
- Eliminate test retake fee;
- Allow test takers to retake only the sections of the exam they did not pass;
- Provide feedback to test takers on the question and areas they did not pass; and
- Engage in restorative measures to compensate test-takers who have taken the test repeatedly.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that social work employment is projected to grow 9 percent from 2021 to 2023, with almost 75,000 positions open yearly. Morgan State University School of Social Work ranks 14th nationally in graduating Black and African American MSW students. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has continually accredited the department since 1975, whose accreditation extended to its MSW program, founded in 2007. Our students meet the criteria for graduation as required by our professional accreditation body, CSWE. Yet despite achieving the necessary professional competency, our students disproportionately enter the profession at a lower rung than their white counterparts who have passed the required licensing exam. This professional and economic trajectory follows them through their professional lives despite eventually passing the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exam.

Despite claims of being statistically free of race and gender bias, in August 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) released its demographic data revealing profound disparities among pass rates for first-time pass rates of the ASWB clinical licensure exam among Black and African American, Latino and Indigenous test takers when compared to their white counterparts. At 45%, less than half of Black and African American first-time test takers passed, in stark contrast to their White counterparts, 84% of whom passed on their first attempt.

Citing literature on the outcome of other professional licensure tests, ASWB posited that the reasons for disparities in test outcomes ranged from systemic issues, e.g., household income, poverty rates, and access to exam preparation resources, to individual issues such as stereotype threat – fears that performance on a task may confirm or reinforce preexisting negative stereotypes. Further, despite reporting the number of social workers who eventually passed the licensing exam, ASWB did not report the number of times a test taker took the exam before passing, nor did the organization report the cumulative cost of each attempt.

In response to these findings, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work Programs, (NADD), and the Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA) have issued statements. Each organization has called for reform, which includes deeper analyses of the outcome data and the test - its construction and validity.

These examinations continue to negatively impact the career trajectories of Black social workers at a time when the need for these practitioners in Maryland and nationally is dire. Senator Mary Washington has introduced SB871 in an effort to address these issues in line with several of our recommendations. We are prepared to provide oral testimony when this bill is brought forward for public comment.

Because of the positive considerations of SB871, Morgan supports this bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Wilson".

Dr. David K. Wilson
President, Morgan State University