

A. Imani Davis
MSW student
University of Maryland/Baltimore

Testimony in Support of
SB:871 Social Workers – Licensure Examinations – Moratorium and Workgroup
Senate Finance Committee
March 10, 2023

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Imani Davis, and I am a student. I am a future mental health clinician and master's in social work candidate at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 871.

I am here because this bill directly impacts me. I am here because I am a member of the demographic that has been harmed by NASWs biased test. My heart raced the first time I learned **black women** over the **age of 40** have significantly lower pass rates than my white peers; my heart sank because they were talking about me.

As I have begun to turn my eyes towards graduation, (apparently it happens this May that was fast) and launch my second career as a clinical social worker, I learned from multiple sources, including a professor and I quote "I should put my mind in the mind-frame of a 30-something or middle aged white woman as I study, and prepare to sit the LMSW exam. Do you know how gut wrenching that is to hear? Even as I typed these words to share with you today, my whole body cringed with muscle memories of rejection known by too many who look like me, just for showing up in my skin.

Imagine if you could, preparing for an exam by negating or pocketing your life's wisdom, which at this stage in my life I have learned to trust more confidently. I trusted that wisdom at 40 something and I walked away from an incredible career in international development determined to apply the same energy domestically. I intend to be part of the change and make contributions here at home. I am here because I answered the call for the need of more mental health professionals. I am here because there is a shortage of black, female mental health professionals and I intend to fill that need.

I am asking for your support for SB0871 (and SB0872), which 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.
- 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.

525 W Redwood St, Baltimore, MD 21201

aidavis@umaryland.edu

(202) 365-6354

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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.

Thank you for your consideration.

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