

Mouny Testimony

For Hearing, March 10, 2023

My name is Dr. Judy Mouny. I am a deaf licensed clinical social worker in private practice in Maryland and a Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE)-approved supervisor. I am testifying in support of bills S.B. 871 and S.B. 872, which provide for temporary licensing and a moratorium on using examinations in the licensing process for social workers.

States across the country are grappling with the profoundly discriminatory impact of biased licensing examinations. This issue has deprived Maryland of more than 1,200 committed and competent mental health providers, including people of color, older candidates, nonnative speakers of English, and deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Failing the licensing examination puts an undue financial and personal burden on these skilled professionals, many of whom have spent thousands of dollars in their attempts to pass, and who often work in lower income jobs because of their lack of a license. Importantly, while the examinations clearly create undue barriers to licensure disproportionately affecting these applicants, in over 40 years of examination history, there is no evidence to show that the examination effectively assesses the quality or safety of social work practice.

As with social workers from other disproportionately affected communities, deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind social workers provide an essential cultural connection. Deaf and hard of hearing people need social workers who are bilingual in American Sign Language and English and who share their lived experiences.

The United States Census Bureau estimates that there are 5,976,407 individuals living in Maryland. Based on the finding of a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, it is estimated that there are approximately 1.2 million Marylanders aged 12 years or older who are

deaf or hard of hearing in at least one ear, and 759,000 Marylanders aged 12 years or older who are deaf or hard of hearing in both ears. These numbers are extrapolated from the Johns Hopkins study's findings and the U.S. Census Bureau's data.

For many deaf and hard of hearing candidates, the linguistic structure of the test items (problematic from the outset because this population has a different experience acquiring and accessing English) and cultural bias of the examination has profoundly impacted access to licensure, employment, ability to serve their population, and advancement in their profession. The issues for deaf and hard of hearing graduates of social work programs are poignantly illuminated in a 2010 article in the *Journal of Social Work in Disability and Rehabilitation* by Dr. Martha Sheridan, Dr. Barbara J. White, and myself titled [“Deaf and Hard of Hearing Social Workers Accessing Their Profession: A Call to Action”](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15367100903524091) (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15367100903524091).

The passage of S.B. 871 and S.B. 872 would allow otherwise qualified social workers to enter and advance practice, while the state develops an alternative practice-based assessment, increasing equity in the licensing process.

Over the course of my 40-plus years of professional experience across multiple disciplines, including psycholinguistics, education, educational research, and now social work, I have witnessed the devastating effects of not passing licensing and certification examinations on the careers and lives of deaf and hard of hearing professionals. For a period of time, I was a research scientist at Educational Testing Service (ETS), investigating why standardized tests are problematic for deaf and hard of hearing people and other populations, and what could be done about it. I co-authored *Assessing Deaf Adults: Critical Issues in Testing and Evaluation* (Gallaudet University Press, 2005), which includes a chapter focused on social work licensing

and discusses the results of a study of deaf and hard of hearing people with social work degrees and their efforts to become licensed

[\[https://gupress.gallaudet.edu/bookpage/ADABookpage.html\]](https://gupress.gallaudet.edu/bookpage/ADABookpage.html).

In 22 years at Gallaudet University, my service included being the Director of Field Education in the Department of Social Work for four years, and teaching a variety of social work courses. Additionally, I worked with Dr. Ellen Schaefer-Salins, currently Professor of Social Work at Salisbury University, to develop a special test preparation course for deaf and hard of hearing social work licensure candidates in the early 2000s. Gallaudet University has CSWE-accredited BSW and MSW programs. Social work is currently the number one major at the university. Hundreds of deaf and hard of hearing people have graduated from MSW programs at Gallaudet and other universities in the past two decades alone. Although there is no reliable data on the licensure status of deaf and hard of hearing individuals, anecdotally we know that a large percentage are not passing the test in Maryland and elsewhere. Some postpone or never take a licensing test out of profound fear of not passing.

Along with Dr. Barbara J. White, a now-retired deaf social worker and former chair of the Gallaudet Department of Social Work, I had several meetings and many communications with the chief executive officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), starting around 2000. We explained the nature of the problem and asked for their support and assistance in collecting data and addressing the issues. The interest was there but there were concerns about cost, given the relatively small size of our community. Also expressed were concerns about collecting and reporting data because of the ADA. ASWB invited me to give presentations several times. In 2004, my husband, Robert Weinstock, who had also worked at ETS and Gallaudet University, and I presented to a blue-ribbon committee of ASWB providing specific

guidance in reimagining test development. A similar presentation was made to ASWB in 2015. I have also expressed interest in becoming involved in the test development process, thus far to no avail.

These bills provide much-needed stop-gap solutions to a very pervasive issue for many populations. It is my hope that these bills will create opportunities for collaboration on equitable solutions and multiple pathways to licensure.

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