



March 9, 2023

To: Senator Melony Griffith, Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Re: Letter of **Support** for **Senate Bills 0871 + 0872**

SB0871: Social Workers - Licensure Examinations - Moratorium and Workgroup

SB0872: State Board of Social Work Examiners - Temporary License to Practice Social Work

Dear Chair Griffith and Maryland Senate Finance Committee Members,

My name is Maria F. Smith, MSW, LCSW-C, LICSW, and I am writing to request **support** for **SB0871** and **SB0872**, which provide temporary licensing and a moratorium on using exams in the licensing process for social workers, while forming a task force to develop long-term solutions.

Over the past 10+ years, I have worked in a number of different organizations with a wide variety of colleagues in both Maryland and Washington, DC. While working at Catholic Charities DC back in 2016, it was determined that **all** employees with social work degrees become licensed to remain employed. At that time, I distinctly remember hearing supervisors share fears of needing to let go of hard-working, dedicated, culturally-competent, linguistically-diverse staff who were English as a second language speakers. Most of these staff members had been front-line workers for years, and faced risk of losing their jobs (and livelihood) if unable to pass a biased social work licensing exam only offered in English. Around this same time, as a young, white, English as a first language speaking woman, I was able to pass my graduate licensing exam on my first attempt. I do not believe I was a more competent social worker. In fact, in many ways, I was likely less competent than my colleagues of color, due to my limited worldview and experiences.

Since 2016, I have continued to witness Black, Latinx, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and older individuals, who have **all** successfully obtained social work degrees, be barred from entering or advancing in the social work profession, due to difficulty passing the current social work licensing exams. As a 31 year-old, white, English-speaking, U.S. born, Hearing woman, I am part of a demographic of people with social work degrees who pass the social work licensing exams often on the first attempt, at both the masters and clinical level. I am also part of a

demographic of people most likely to hold a greater amount of societal privilege and often but not always, less likely to fully understand cultural implications in social work practice.

It is vital that specific short-term and long-term solutions are identified to this grave injustice, such as those proposed in SB0871 and SB0872, in order to rectify harm already caused to my colleagues who are often more qualified to speak to and understand the nuances of cultural differences pertaining to older adults, immigrants and children of immigrants, African American people, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing folks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria F. Smith, MSW, LCSW-C
Rockville, Montgomery County, Maryland
maria@inclusivetherapy.org
Inclusive Therapy