

Dear Senators,

As a seasoned Social Worker with a preventive case management, therapeutic and leadership/management background, I am writing this to request your support for **SB0871 and SB0872**, which provides 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 global language speakers. Failing the test puts an undue financial and personal burden on these skilled professionals.

Also, the exams deny Marylanders the help they deserve, especially in communities of color where the need is growing. We must remove the undue barriers to their licensure. 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.

When the exams excludes dedicated, compassionate and talented Social Workers from moving forward in their career, the quality of life for both the Social Workers and the residents in the Maryland are significantly impacted in the following ways:

- Increase of Maryland residents with unaddressed mental health and substance abuse disorders
- Decrease of accessible preventive measures and mental health emergency services in low-income communities
- Increased 911 calls
- Overcrowded ER rooms due to an uptick of behavioral health visits for mental health crises, substance abuse and/or psychotropic medication refills
- Extensive waitlists for Maryland residents to gain access to community mental health services
- Increased burnout and turnover amongst existing licensed Social Workers due to understaffing which leads to unsustainable work environments
- Disrupted service delivery/gaps in mental health services for Maryland residents due to overburdened caseloads, understaffed agencies and overworked existing licensed Social Workers
- Unlicensed and LMSW's often work multiple demanding jobs in efforts to keep up with the cost of living, while managing intensive caseloads and paperwork requirements while studying for the LMSW/LCSW/C exam which is not feasible, conducive or healthy
- Master Level Social Work Interns transfer their caseloads after a few months of direct service because once their internship is complete, they no longer meet the requirements necessary to carry out the same position until they pass the exam, which has perpetuated a cycle of premature termination, overburdening existing licensed Social Worker with transferred cases or placing vulnerable individuals on another wait list either internally or externally
- The lack of diverse representation in the field, often prevents marginalized community members for seeking out mental health services or sustaining mental health services due to existing health care disparities
- Ultimately, alternative pathways for Social Workers licensure is critical if we truly want to reform the efficacy of service delivery outcomes as to improve the quality of life for Maryland residents.

This is not an exhaustive list. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Victoria Rodriguez

