



March 8, 2023

The Honorable Chairwoman Melony Griffith
The Senate Finance Committee
Senate Finance Committee

RE: SB0871: Licensure Examinations - Moratorium and Workgroup/SB0872: Temporary License to Practice Social Work

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Madam Chair Griffith, Madam Vice-Chair Klausmeier, and esteemed Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express support for SB871 and SB872. I am submitting this testimony as a licensed social worker on behalf of the Board of Child Care (BCC). My intention is to share how the current licensing regulations, specifically related to dependence on the Association of Social Work Boards exam to establish competency, have negatively impacted on our ability to deliver critical, culturally competent services to Maryland's most vulnerable families.

Board of Child Care is an independent, non-profit that provides youth and families with a broad continuum of treatment programs, including education, foster care, behavioral health, and therapeutic residential services. Last year BCC Served over 1300 families throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Operating programs across state lines gives BCC a unique perspective of best practice in each area. BCC has programs in West Virginia where they have already adopted a temporary license to practice social work. Like the amendments proposed in SB0872, qualified individuals can practice under the supervision of an approved clinical supervisor while they are pending licensure.

Board of Child Care depends on the skill of qualified licensed social workers to meet both regulatory requirements and our treatment paradigm. Over the past three years, BCC has been challenged to employ licensed social workers at the Masters level (LMSW) and Advanced level (LCSW and LCSW-C), both critical to the operations of our programs. As a result, BCC has reduced capacity by nearly 50% in some of our programs. The reduction in treatment options places further strain on an already taxed system. This results in Maryland's youth having their treatment needs met in out of state programs or languishing in emergency rooms or other environments that are not designed to meet their medical conditions.

Several of my team members have experienced challenges in completing the licensing process after graduating with a MSW degree and/or meeting the requirements of advanced licensure specifically related to passing the ASWB test. Most have completed their internships at BCC or worked in other roles and are excited to continue their professional development and serve the youth and families within the program but are unable to pass the ASWB test even after multiple times.

There are vast disparities in social work licensure exam scores according to a report released by the ASWB in August 2022. The discriminatory trends noted in the test data mirror the experience of members of my team. Most of my teammates that have had to take the test multiple times are black and brown and for some, English is not their first language. They are disheartened by the process and have contemplated leaving the profession or working in a different helping capacity so they can do the work that are trained and committed to do.

In this current national workforce crisis, it is important that we remove any barriers to build Maryland's mental health workforce. 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.

It is for these reasons that I respectfully ask for a favorable report on SB871 and SB872. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Nicole Smith, LMSW
Executive Director