

Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Philicia Ross, I am a LMSW and I live in district 23. I fully support bills SB871(with the amendment of the workgroup, keeping the moratorium in place) and SB872 and am asking for the Committee members to vote favorable. I graduated with my Masters of Social Work in 2019 and in this short period of time can attest to the great harm I have gone through as a result of having the barrier of the exam. For the first year of my social work journey I was trying to find work. This was perplexing to me because of the amount of work I had done to graduate. By the time I was awarded my Masters, I had already completed 2 years of internship by a Clinically trained board certified social worker for a CSWE approved internship program. I did this internship work for no pay, utilizing my own resources and familial support systems. My dismay came when I realized I was denied paid work because I could not pass a licensure exam. Not because I wasn't qualified in education, after all I passed a CSWE approved program. Not due to lack of passing a background check. Not even being disapproved of by my Clinical supervisor, only an exam.

This exam did not reflect any of my experiences as a competent social worker nor test on accurate details of what I would actually do as a social worker. The hundreds of dollars and hours I spent in my higher learning was not enough to prepare for this exam, which the ASWB states to be a "measure of competency". Instead my education was geared towards actual, practical experience and the exam was geared towards measures of safety that were very clearly white washed, and in some cases culturally unethical. What I do as a black, queer, larger bodied, woman when I interact with someone who has similar experiences like me as a social worker was not represented in those questions. In fact, I was prepped to think "like a heterosexual white woman" which is incredibly harmful to the psyche and not a value that social work says it stands on in terms of diversity, inclusion, and social justice. In fact, the ASWB is a third party who states they stand on the same values of social work but has continued to pump harm into the field for capitalistic gain over the ethics that social work was founded on. As a member of the NASW I am disheartened that nothing has been done about this sooner.

I have noticed in other states like Illinois and California that not having an exam from the ASWB, and having equitable paths to licensure has increased social workers over 80% AND has helped eased the mental health and public health crisis for which social workers are often at the front lines of but never fully recognized for. These bills would be a gateway for Maryland social workers to be able to follow suit and ease a public and mental health crisis that we are seeing everywhere but very particularly in Maryland through substance use, lack of programs for our teens & youth to be engaged, and adults in the most marginalized of spaces. I hope that the Finance Committee stands on the side of the people, ALL people who represent this field, and not on the side of capitalistic gain that continues to aid the workforce shortage but continues to harm our most vulnerable populations.

Thank you,

Philicia Ross, LMSW