

To: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Rachel Doyle, LICSW

Re: SB871 and SB872

Position: Favorable

Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing to you as a lifelong Maryland resident, a human services professional for almost 20 years, a social worker for over a decade, and a clinical supervisor for the past 5 years. **I urge you to support SB871 with the workgroup amendment and SB872.**

In August 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards, which writes social work licensing exams, [released data](#) showing what social workers already knew colloquially – these exams are biased and gatekeep talented BIPOC, older, and non-native English speakers out of our profession. **ASWB claims that their exams “protect the public” and assess for baseline competence and safety, but there is no proof behind these claims.** We as a nation are grappling with a mental health crisis brought on by Covid-19 and a workforce shortage. By keeping out talented social workers, ASWB exams are in fact harming the public, and they are harming our most vulnerable Maryland residents. Even the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) said on February 3, 2023, that [it opposes ASWB exams](#) because of the glaring pass rate disparities.

As a graduate of University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work, I paid special attention to the [pass rate disparities](#) of my alma mater. The pass rate disparities are gaping for white social workers and Black social workers – from 2018-2021, there was a difference of 27.8% at the master’s level and 24.3% at the clinical level. Even though this is better than the national averages, it is still a large gap and disparities exist between white social workers and other racial groups as well. I am here to tell you that this is not an accurate reflection of the students I sat next to while I was in school. I learned a lot from my BIPOC colleagues, they were excellent future social workers, and it is a travesty that I was more likely to pass the exam simply due to my race.

Rather than use this data to reflect on their perpetuation of discrimination, ASWB has doubled down. They have not shown that they are willing to be collaborative partners to ensure that everyone who has otherwise completed rigorous social work requirements has equal opportunity to become a social worker. Therefore, the only solution is to pause the harm that the ASWB exam causes in the State of Maryland, then find a better path forward that does not discriminate on the basis of race, age, English language speaker status, or Deaf/Hard of Hearing status.

Some opponents of these measures worry about insurance reimbursement rates. This worry is not based in fact. Insurance companies are only concerned with licensure, not whether passing a test was part of licensure or not. When the ASWB exams were new, many social workers were exempted from taking the exams but still allowed to obtain full licensure. Some of these social workers are still in practice today. There is no evidence that they receive lower reimbursement rates or that their practice

is less competent or safe.

Others worry that eliminating the exams delegitimizes our profession. I speak for a large number of social workers when I say that I am not willing to throw my BIPOC, older, non-native English speakers, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing colleagues under the bus in the name of a test that provides artificial legitimacy to our profession. I do not know a single social worker who thinks these tests are a good measure of competence – at best, they are a silly and expensive hoop to jump through, and at worst, they keep great social workers out of our profession. We need to confront racism wherever we can; social work can be a pioneer, bringing greater legitimacy to our profession by eliminating these exams. Clients will see that we are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and they will be more comfortable coming to us because of it. For anyone who feels the exams are an important part of their own licensure path, there is nothing in the bill language that precludes social workers from taking ASWB exams.

There has been a lot of misinformation about Illinois, which has been a pioneer in reducing the influence of the ASWB in their state. The truth is that they had a surge of over 2,000 competent social workers when they dropped the master's level exam requirement, and there was no corresponding increase in complaints to their licensing board. The master's level initiative has been so successful that there is current legislation introduced to find a permanent non-exam path for clinical licensure. Maryland now has the opportunity to also be a pioneer in addressing ASWB's systemic discrimination.

SB871 and SB872 will allow us to immediately pause the harm of these discriminatory examinations. It will allow Maryland to address an enormous workforce shortage. It will give our talented BIPOC, older, non-native English speakers, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing social workers the opportunity to do what they do best – empower and serve Maryland residents. Then, we will have a diverse taskforce that will allow us to find a better assessment tool than harmful ASWB exams. Thank you for your favorable vote.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Doyle, LICSW