



March 9, 2023

To: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Pathways to Housing DC

Re: SB0871 Social Workers - Licensure Examinations - Moratorium and Workgroup  
SB0872 State Board of Social Work Examiners - Temporary License to Practice Social Work

**Position: Favorable**

Pathways to Housing DC opened in 2004 when we brought the Housing First model to Washington, DC. We were thrilled to expand our services into Montgomery County, MD in 2018 with the receipt of a five-year innovation grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that we called “Pathways Home”. Using a client-centered approach, our efforts target Montgomery County’s residents experiencing homelessness who are living with substance use and/or co-occurring mental health disorders whose service needs are not being met by existing programs. With recent expansions of outreach and housing programs in Montgomery County, Pathways to Housing DC is also responding to an increase in our Hispanic population where approximately 11% of our clients identify as Hispanic or Latino. Our program meets the needs of this community by ensuring that our services are available in both English and Spanish languages.

Pathways to Housing DC fully supports **SB0871 and SB0872**, which provide 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 foreign 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.

We have directly witnessed staff who our licensed social workers have assessed as qualified and competent be impacted by the use of the Association of Social Work Boards' exams.

For the reasons listed above, Pathways to Housing DC urges the committee to issue favorable reports for Senate Bills 0871 and 0872.



Christy Respress, MSW, President & CEO

Andre Pelegrini, MBA, Chief Operating Officer

Janelle Greene Smith, JD, M.Div., Vice President of Housing First

Gwendolyn A. Harter, LCSW-C, Director of Montgomery County Programs

Sara Brown, LCSW-C, Director of Veterans Services