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Stacey Hardy-Chandler, Ph.D., JD, LCSW

17126 Mountain Run Vista Ct.
Culpeper, VA 22701

t / 800.225.6880
f / 540.829.0562
info@aswb.org

aswb.org

Written Testimony of Opposition to Senate Bill 871

Maryland Senate Finance Committee

March 9, 2023

Submitted by: Stacey Hardy-Chandler, PhD, JD, LCSW

Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). ASWB develops and administers the social work licensure examination and also provides support and services to regulatory entities in all 50 states and 4 U.S. territories. ASWB is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to social work regulation. Core to our mission are accountability and public protection through the promotion of safe, competent, and ethical social work practices.

I am submitting testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 871 which makes changes to licensure requirements for social workers. While in concept, we support a workgroup, we have grave concerns about the option to issue a license without an examination as permitted by this emergency bill.

The primary function of licensure regulation is protecting the public. One way we do this is through **verifying minimum competence to practice** as part of our duty of accountability to the public. Professional licensure examinations are the only part of license issuance decisions overseen by regulators themselves in making these crucial decisions. Educational degrees and supervised experience are other aspects of the licensure issuance equation. **Each of these three components offer critical and distinct information that cannot be substituted by the other two; they are complementary, not interchangeable.** Combined, all three components of the licensure accountability equation offer the level of regulatory diligence and oversight that communities served by social workers deserve. The removal of the examination requirement, for any period of time, diminishes our accountability to the public we serve.

As with other healthcare professions, **social work licensure examinations are based on what those who actually work in real-world settings define as entry-to-practice knowledge, skills, and abilities.** These examinations are not academic capstones; they are post-graduate measures that complement the information gleaned from applicants' educational backgrounds to make better decisions in support of strengthening public safety.

This bill would create differences among social workers with the same "licensed" title, creating a bifurcated system. When members of the public work with someone using the title "professional social worker," they deserve to know that there is a standard regulatory consistency in what that credential means.

Professional examinations offer the only **continuously vetted, objective measure** of entry-to-practice competence in licensure issuance decisions. **They involve robust anti-bias measures and embed layers of checks and balances.** As with engineering, medicine, nursing, psychology and other professional disciplines, social work examinations are reliable, valid, and involve a psychometric process that follows industry standards developed jointly with the American Educational

Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.

As social work regulators, the members of ASWB believe in the importance of practice mobility, affording licensed social workers the ability to practice in any state. With the Council of State Governments' release of the final language for social work licensing compact legislation, we are now one step closer to increased public access to social work services. To do so requires an element of licensure decisions that jurisdictions all have in common. Currently, that unifying element is the licensing examination, and until alternatives are vetted and available, Maryland social workers who do not take the exam and communities who might be served by social workers from other locations (e.g., military) are limited from this opportunity.

As it pertains to the proposed workgroup, ASWB is already exploring alternative competency measurements on behalf of all of our members, including Maryland. **This is part of the support and services ASWB provides to our state-level member boards to lessen the financial and administrative burdens on them.** With guidance and direction, a workgroup could have a valuable impact on the evolution of competency assessment which is why ASWB provides multiple opportunities for stakeholders to convene around regulation nationally. We support having ASWB representation on the proposed Maryland-based workgroup or serving as a regulatory resource for those appointed to serve on it.

In some way, all of us are accountable to the public. A professional license is a government-issued assurance that the licensee has met minimum competency standards to practice ethically and safely. It further assures the consumer of recourse in the event of malpractice. **Professional examinations ensure accountability** in the licensing process.

ASWB welcomes the opportunity to work in collaboration with stakeholders to address and resolve concerns for the best possible outcome – for the profession and for the residents of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,



Chief Executive Officer
Association of Social Work Boards

ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.