

March 28, 2023

To: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Gretchen M. Tome, LCSW-C

Re: SB0871 Social Workers - Sunset Extension, Notification of Complete Application, and Workgroup on Social Worker Examination Requirements for Licensure

SB0145 State Board of Social Work Examiners - Conditional and Temporary Licenses to Practice Social Work

Position: Favorable

I am a resident of Maryland in Baltimore City, District 45. I am also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, having graduated from the University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work (UMB-SSW) in 2003 and obtained my clinical license in 2008. Over the past twenty years, I have worked in a variety of settings including nonprofit agencies, Baltimore County's Health Department, Anne Arundel County's Health Department, and currently in Baltimore City Public Schools. I have supervised LMSW-level Social Workers as a Board-approved supervisor, and served as a Field Instructor for Masters-level students at UMB-SSW. I am firmly in support of developing alternate pathways to licensure at the Masters (LMSW) and Clinical (LCSW-C) levels as the exams do not measure one's ability to practice Social Work, and create unnecessary barriers to professionals in our field and the communities we serve.

The ASWB (Association of Social Work Boards) released exam pass/fail data in [August 2022](#) which documented the very real financial, mental, and emotional harm that I and my colleagues have witnessed and/or experienced as a result of the ASWB exams widespread disparities based on age, race, language, and gender. I personally have witnessed colleagues and supervisees struggle with passing the exams regardless of their actual abilities to connect with the people we serve and provide high quality care.

At a time when we see mental health struggles and substance use disorders on the rise, we must ensure that we are bringing more qualified and talented Social Workers into the field. Representation matters. The communities we serve are diverse in terms of race, gender identity, age, language, among other factors. We must ensure that we are attracting and advancing an equally diverse professional workforce. Our current system of licensure exams does not do this and it is time to explore and create alternate pathways.

Therefore, I support a favorable vote on SB0871 and S0145. These bills create a diversified work group specifically focused on addressing alternatives to culturally biased exams. In addition, these bills provide an opportunity for people with Bachelors of Social Work (BSWs) and Masters of Social Work (MSWs) degrees to enter and advance in the social work profession without having to pass a very biased exam.

In addition to a **favorable vote**, I strongly support the following amendments:

SB0871

Reinstatement of the 1-year moratorium on all social work licensing exams. While we wait for a workgroup to identify long-term solutions, social work professionals already licensed at the Master's Level (LMSWs) will continue to be denied promotions while often paying hundreds of dollars per month in mandatory supervision while they continue to try to pass the LCSW-C exam. A moratorium would pause the requirement to pass culturally biased exams to achieve licensure while allowing more social workers to become licensed under the BSWE.

Adjust language in the workgroup, per request by the Deaf and hard of hearing community, from "a representative of Gallaudet University" to "A social worker designated by the Maryland Association of the Deaf who is familiar with the licensing process for deaf and hard of hearing social workers." A representative from Gallaudet does not ensure that the representative is Deaf or understands the exam issue from the Deaf perspective.

SB0145

Change "The BSWE may..." to "The BSWE shall..." The BSWE has historically not addressed disparities in social work licensing and opposed temporary licensing. The shift from "may" to "shall" ensures the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) grants temporary licensure to eligible candidates.

Reinstate 2-year temporary licensure for LCSW-Cs. Temporary licensure for LCSW-C is currently amended out of SB0145. The LCSW-C exam is just as biased as the LBSW and LMSW exam. It is imperative that we include LCSW-Cs as possible candidates for temporary licensure. Many are ready to advance in our field but are unable to do so because of the barrier of a bias exam.

Sincerely,

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