

Dear Members of the Health, Government, and Operations Committee and Members of the Health Occupations and Long Term Care Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today. I am writing to you as a lifelong Maryland resident, a social worker for more than a decade, and a social work supervisor for the past five years. **I am requesting your favorable report for SB871 and SB145.** Your colleagues, both on the Senate floor and in the Senate Finance Committee, passed these bills **unanimously**, and I hope that you will, too. **I support these bills even without amendments, but I am requesting five of them:**

1. **SB145, “may” to “shall”:** The Board of Social Work Educators (BSWE) testified in opposition to SB872 (now SB145) and has not shown that exam bias is a concern to them. I believe if they are given the option (“may”) to issue temporary licenses, they will not do it. I would like this language to compel them to issue temporary licenses (“shall”).
2. **SB145, add LCSW-C:** These exams are harmful at all levels. Therefore, there is no reason that someone who otherwise meets LCSW-C requirements should not be able to receive temporary licensure to practice independently.
3. **SB871, Moratorium Reinstatement:** The Senate Finance Committee removed the one-year moratorium on the exam requirement for all licensure levels. I would like the moratorium reinstated. These exams are harmful at all levels, the moratorium will allow the harm to fully pause for all license levels.
4. **SB871, Workgroup Amendment:** The Deaf and hard of hearing community has requested language that specifically requires their representative to be Deaf or hard of hearing. A representative from Gallaudet does not ensure that the representative is Deaf or understands the exam issue from a Deaf perspective. They would also like the representative to be chosen by someone in Maryland. The requested language is as follows: *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.*
5. **SB871, Workgroup Amendment:** The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) has not shown that they are operating in good faith in this process. They continuously blame “upstream factors” and take zero accountability that their exam could have even the smallest amount of bias. While their perspective on infrastructure could be useful to the workgroup, I do not believe ASWB deserves two workgroup members. I believe that one member would allow them representation without giving them an outsized voice.

In August 2022, the ASWB, 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, as well as Deaf and hard of hearing social workers. These are not differences that can be explained away by “upstream factors.” **ASWB claims that their exams “protect the public” and assess 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 *harming* vulnerable Marylanders. These exams are therefore directly harming Maryland residents who lose access to not only care, but culturally and linguistically appropriate care. 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.

Currently, I provide field instruction for MSW student interns as they prepare for their social work careers. They are a talented and diverse group of social work students; I am proud to have a part in their formation as social workers. I have watched too many talented Black social workers delay their careers solely because of this discriminatory exam. These exams directly harm my gifted social work students, many of whom made great sacrifices to attend graduate school for a profession with a notably low payscale.

But, when my students are harmed, it does not solely harm my students. It is harmful to their potential clients when they are unable to work with the people they have trained intensely for two years to serve. I see such a waste of great talent when my students cannot work under *supervised practice* due to an exam that has zero proof that it measures safe and competent social work practice. When my students have to pay hundreds of dollars in exam fees multiple times, it does however, help grow ASWB's \$33 million and counting in assets. Of note, ASWB is classified as a non-profit, but it is clear that they are profiting immensely off of social workers.

SB871 and SB145 bills have a broad base of support from not only a variety of social workers, but many organizations with "boots on the ground": Morgan State University, The Arc, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Kennedy Krieger Institute, Catholic Charities - Baltimore, Pathways to Housing DC, Maryland Association of the Deaf, Hearts and Homes for Youth, Healthcare for the Homeless, Project Plase, Board of Child Care, Arrow Child and Family Ministries, and Pressley Ridge. **These are the organizations that are truly able to assess the harm that the ASWB exams are causing. They witness the damage that our workforce shortage is doing to Marylanders in need of services. They are the ones who are witnessing the challenges of providing culturally and linguistically competent care when so many BIPOC, non-native English speaking, and Deaf social workers are kept out of our profession.**

There are three organizations that have influence and a reputation in Maryland who oppose these bills, but I urge you to look beneath their "reputation" and look carefully at the strength of their arguments and the roles they play.

Maryland BSWE opposes these bills, but their concerns are not based in fact, and I urge you to carefully scrutinize their role. BSWE is a member of ASWB, so they are hardly unbiased. BSWE has been receiving data from ASWB for years about who passes and does not pass these exams, so they have known about these disparities, yet done nothing. A concerned BSWE would have had a

response to the data release in August or September 2022. They only responded to the concerns in [January 2023](#), claiming the importance of these exams for public protection. Finally, **BSWE is actively and directly contributing to our workforce shortage**, as they are frequently forcing license applicants to wait for more than *six months* for a response to their applications despite a 60-day mandate. The workforce shortage is hardly a concern of theirs, or they would be in compliance with the 60-day mandate. They are hardly committed to doing the right thing to help Marylanders or Maryland social workers.

National Association of Social Workers - Maryland (NASW-MD) also opposes these bills. It is important to know that they took no official poll of their members, and colloquially, only a handful of powerful leadership members are the ones opposed. Additionally, by opposing these bills, they are going against our national NASW. NASW-MD is out of touch with Maryland social workers.

Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work (GWSCSW) has also opposed these bills. They provided misleading statements in their testimony, stating that these bills would jeopardize Maryland's participation in the [Interstate Compact](#). They have since corrected this inaccuracy to Senate Finance Committee members and Senator Washington, as this was unequivocally false. They also claimed to represent the interests of 9300 clinical social workers in Maryland. The truth is that they have less than 750 members, not all of whom are licensed in Maryland.

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 ("grandfathered") 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 has been 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 SB145 will allow us to immediately mitigate some of the harm of these discriminatory examinations. It will allow Maryland to address an enormous workforce shortage. It will give our skilled LBSW and LMSW 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 way forward than harmful ASWB exams. Thank you for your favorable vote.

I have additionally attached two informational sheets to help members of HGO learn more about these bills. Thank you again.

Sincerely,
Rachel Doyle, LICSW
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District 21