

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Philicia Ross, LCSW-C, and I am reaching out to you not only as a professional deeply committed to the field of social work but also as the NAACP appointee to the Workgroup concerned with licensure processes in our state. Since our last interaction, where I shared my personal journey and the challenges faced by many in our profession, particularly those from black and POC, older, disabled, deaf, and hard of hearing backgrounds, I have followed the developments around Bill SB0204 closely.

The intent behind SB0204, to address and potentially mitigate the barriers to licensure, is commendable. However, as it stands, the bill seems to inadvertently solidify the ASWB's role as the primary, if not sole, pathway to licensure. This is particularly concerning for those of us who work in clinical settings and serve underrepresented communities. The opt-in feature, intended to offer flexibility, in reality, may not provide a viable alternative for many, effectively asking future social workers to endure a system that has systematically disadvantaged them.

As the NAACP appointee to the Workgroup, which unfortunately started its work later than anticipated and has yet to make formal recommendations, I find it imperative to request a deferment of the vote on SB0204. The current language within the bill risks further entrenching a status quo that many of us have been vocal about changing. It sends a disheartening message, especially during Black History Month, reminding us of past oversights and the continued struggle against systemic barriers within our profession.

The experiences shared by many during the last legislative session, and the discussions surrounding tiered licensure resonate deeply with the concerns SB0204 raises. The absence of significant representation from marginalized communities in the major organizational testimonies on this bill highlights a gap that we cannot overlook. Many social workers, deserving of recognition and titles that reflect their invaluable contributions, remain hindered by the current licensure path.

In closing, I respectfully urge that the committee consider these concerns with the seriousness they warrant. Until we can ensure that SB0204 reflects the inclusive, equitable principles that the social work profession stands for, I believe it would be premature to move forward with it as proposed.

Thank you for your time and for considering my appeal. I am keen on collaborating with you and all stakeholders to find a pathway forward that honors the diversity and strength of our profession.

Respectfully submitted,

Philicia Ross, LCSW-C