

Testimony in Support of SB 379
State Board of Social Work Examiners – Membership and Examination

Thank you, Chairman Senator Beidle, Vice Chair Senator Hayes, and members of the Finance Committee for addressing this important issue and recognizing the vital role of social workers in Maryland. As dean of the University of Maryland, School of Social Work, I appreciate the opportunity to express our support for SB 379, which proposes removing the licensing exam requirement for entry-level licensure: *Licensed Bachelor of Social Work (LBSW)* or *Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW)*.

In August 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards released data revealing troubling disparities in exam pass rates among racial groups, particularly for Black test takers. Other groups, including older adults and those for whom English is not their primary language, also faced lower pass rates. These disparities were found across the state and country and highlight systemic inequities in the exam. The social work community, including higher education programs, is committed to confronting and dismantling systemic racism within our profession. Removing the exam requirement is a step toward equity.

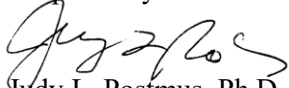
I serve on the *Workgroup on Social Work Licensure Requirements*, established by SB 871 during the 2024 legislative session. Our workgroup examined licensing practices across the country and found that there are 10 states that never had an exam and another 4 states that eliminated or are in process of eliminating the exam requirement. Those states that successfully removed the exam (e.g. Illinois) experienced an increase in the number of licensed social workers entering the field. As you know, Maryland faces a shortage of social workers. Removing this unnecessary barrier will help expand the workforce and ensure that more qualified professionals are available to serve our communities.

SB 379 ensures that the other important licensing requirements remain in place including graduating from a social work program that is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and undergoing a criminal history records check. Additionally, licensed social workers work under the supervision of experienced social workers. They are also required to complete 40 hours of continuing education every two years.

Social work academic programs are rigorous, requiring extensive coursework, field practicums, and evaluations. These experiences equip graduates with the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality and ethical services. SB 379 reflects a commitment to creating an equitable and inclusive licensing process while protecting public safety. By eliminating the exam requirement, we can break down unnecessary barriers and strengthen Maryland's social work workforce.

We urge the Committee to support this essential reform. Thank you for your consideration of SB 379.

Respectfully submitted by



Judy L. Postmus, Ph.D., ACSW, Dean & Professor

Cc: Senators M. Washington, Benson, Lam, and Brooks