

February 4, 2025

RE: Support for SB379 | State Board of Social Work Examiners-Membership and Examination Requirements.

Commented [1]: SB379 or SB0379

Position: Favorable

My name is Tarahn Harris. I am a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Social Work, class of 2005. I wholeheartedly support SB379 in its current form. This bill repeals the examination requirements for bachelor and master level licenses, which aligns with recommendations of Maryland's Workgroup on Social Workers requirement for Licensure. The work group was made up of competent professionals who provided insight into the harm that the licensing exam has caused. As a person who has been directly impacted by the licensing exam, I can tell that the exam is culturally and ethnically biased. The current structure of the licensing exam does not measure competency as it relates to direct Social Work practice.

The Workgroup has taken the time and effort required by the Senate committee to identify alternative pathways to the current structure of the licensing requirements. The data shows that there is a shortage of competent available social workers to provide services to various populations. A major part of this shortage is a direct result of there not being enough licensed social workers. Maryland must open the door for more social workers to become licensed and be able to provide services.

After graduating from UMD I studied and prepared for the Social Work License Exam with former classmates and peers. While preparing and studying for the exam, one of the resounding memories I have is that I was encouraged to answer questions on the exam as if I was a white person - that was going to be my best chance of passing the exam. After 3 attempts from 2005-2010 I was unable to pass the licensing exam despite months of preparation and studying. This caused a significant strain on my self-confidence and ability to believe that I had the necessary skills to be an impactful social worker. The times that I took the exam and failed, I failed by 2 or 3 points. The financial strain from the exam fee and the costs of study guides and courses were also challenging and discouraged me from attempting to take the exam moving forward.

With my inability to pass the licensure exam, I was limited to what I could do for my Social Work career. For 5-7 years I was required to practice Social Work under a Licensed Social Worker, capping my salary and career trajectory despite my increasing experience and expertise. Eventually, I was forced to walk away from the clinical side of Social Work as a direct result of not having my license. The exam is biased, often utilizing racial stereotypes and microaggressions within the questions, as well as the questions often displaying poor social work practice. The ASWB has had 40 years to remove bias from its exams, has not done so, and even continues to state that their exams are not biased. Removing this barrier will be helpful in opening the door for more eligible social workers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter.

Tarahh Harris, MSW
University of Maryland School of Social Work class of 2005