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**Stacey Hardy-Chandler**, Ph.D., JD, LCSW, PGDip

17126 Mountain Run Vista Ct.  
Culpeper, VA 22701

t / 800.225.6880

f / 540.829.0562

info@aswb.org

aswb.org

Senator Pamela Beidle  
Senate Finance Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

***Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 0379, "State Board of Social Work Examiners – Membership and Examination Requirements" and raising awareness of conflicts with Senate Bill 0174 and House Bill 0345***

Friday, January 31, 2025

Dear Chair Beidle and Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the nonprofit professional regulatory association that supports the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners in the fulfillment of its public protection mandate. I write to your committee today in opposition to Senate Bill 0379, "State Board of Social Work Examiners – Membership and Examination Requirements" and also to raise awareness of complications this legislation would present for Maryland's adoption of the licensure compact as proposed in two recently introduced pieces of legislation: Senate Bill 0174 and House Bill 0345.

Our opposition is specific to the bill's provision of an option to issue a license without an examination. This view is based on ASWB's position that the public's need for consistency regarding what it means when services are provided by an individual using the title of "licensed social worker" and fair and objective competence measurements are both vital to professional licensure decisions.

Like other professional healthcare associations, ASWB provides resources, services, and technical support to regulatory entities throughout the United States and Canada. This support includes overseeing the development and administration of the social work licensing examinations. Founded more than 45 years ago, ASWB is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to social work regulation representing all 64 state and provincial governments.

Core to our mission is accountability and public protection through the regulation of safe, competent, and ethical social work practices. Objective entry-to-practice competence measurements help us achieve that mandate. Our work ensures that the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners, as an ASWB member board, has access to the data and tools required to provide oversight for the social work profession, including initial licensure decisions. The integrity of our work on behalf of our members is what compels me to raise concerns with Senate Bill 0379.

Senate Bill 0379 eliminates the authority of the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners to require competence assessment for social work licensure, removing the licensing exam requirement for the bachelor's and master's categories of social work licensure in Maryland. As with other professions in Maryland, social work is a licensed, regulated profession. This designation demands uniform standards that uphold the public's confidence and trust. To protect the public and professional practitioners, licensed professions require uniform entry-to-practice competence measurements. These measurements help bring legitimacy to those serving in the field – and assurances to the individuals in their care.

Professional licensure decisions generally include education, experience, and examination. Of these, the exams are the only part of license issuance decisions overseen by regulatory entities, including the Board of Social Work Examiners. Importantly, they are the only uniform aspect of this process across jurisdictions. Best practices dictate that regulators should directly oversee some component of the vital decision, as opposed to singular reliance on an external sector such as education serving as the primary determiner of licensure approvals. Licensing exams bring legitimacy and support public confidence in regulated professions.

Moreover, professional exams offer the only continuously vetted, objective measurement of entry-to-practice competence in license issuance decisions. The development process for these exams begins with a practice analysis which sources content about social work practice from those who are actually practicing. These national surveys of the profession – the most recent of which took place from March to June 2024 – ensure that the licensing exams keep pace with evolving standards of practice.

The development process also involves robust anti-bias measures and embeds layers of checks and balances beyond anything available in degree-granting institutions. As with licensing exams for other health professions like medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and psychology, social work licensing exams are reliable, are valid, and involve a psychometric process that adheres to industry standards developed jointly with the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.

In some way, all of us are accountable to the public. Professional exams factor solidly into public accountability by offering a mechanism for telling the public something about the qualities and capacities of someone calling themselves a “licensed social worker.” These exams verify minimum competence to practice as part of the Board of Social Work Examiners’ duty of accountability to the public. Educational degrees and supervised experience are other aspects of the license issuance equation. Each of these components offers critical and distinct information that cannot be substituted by the other two; they are complementary, not interchangeable. Combined, all three components of the licensure accountability equation offer the level of regulatory diligence and oversight that communities served by social workers deserve.

The removal of the exam requirement diminishes our accountability to the public we serve. In this instance, it also jeopardizes Maryland’s ability to participate in and enjoy the benefits of the interstate social work licensure compact. This poses a challenge to not only the state’s social work workforce but also the communities they serve. The interstate social work licensure compact will enable licensed social workers to serve clients in every state that joins the compact. However, this compact requires social workers to take and pass the qualifying national exam that corresponds with the category of multistate license sought by a practitioner.

Finally, I urge the committee to take note of a recent nationwide survey conducted by the American Foundation for Research and Consumer Education in Social Work Regulation which reveals that a vast majority of social workers support use of the exam. The survey shows 76% of social workers believe the exam is crucial for maintaining high professional standards, and 78% advocate for its necessity for new professionals. Additionally, 73% consider it a mistake to remove the exam requirement, reflecting a strong commitment to the exam as a necessary component of licensure. ASWB stands by the exam as a highly vetted process offering fairness to candidates and assurances to the public that licensed professional social workers serve.

Respectfully submitted,



Stacey D. Hardy-Chandler, PhD, JD, LCSW, PGDip  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Social Work Boards

*ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.*