January 31, 2025

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to you as a LCSW-C in the state of Maryland. I urge you to codify workgroup recommendations and **find a favorable report for SB379.** This bill will increase accountability to the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) by adding two more consumer members, and it will also create a more equitable path to social work without sacrificing social work competence.

In 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) released [data](#) that shows alarming disparities in pass rates of social work licensing exams. These disparities demonstrate lower pass rates in BIPOC, older, and multilingual social workers. According to ASWB's own data, first-time pass rates for white candidates are around **84%**, compared to **45%** for Black candidates and **64%** for Hispanic candidates. Additionally, pass rates go down as test taker age goes up. We know these disparities are not due to competence; they are inherent in the design of standardized testing.

In response to the data release, Maryland legislature passed a social work licensing workgroup in 2023, and it was signed into law. The workgroup started meeting in October 2023. They have been meeting monthly and heard from a diverse array of perspectives. **The workgroup determined that removing the exam at the Bachelors (LBSW) and Masters (LMSW) levels is the best way to move forward for our state**.

We also know that standardized testing bias means that **marginalized communities are deprived of representation in social work**. As a non-native Spanish speaker myself, I can personally attest to the fact that our state is in desperate need of bilingual, bicultural social workers. I know that qualified individuals are being kept from securing jobs in the social work field. Maryland needs to do better, not only for social workers seeking employment, but for clients who need to work with social workers who understand their culture.

Additionally, the exam does nothing to ensure social worker competence. Having taken ASWB exams at the LMSW and the LCSW level, I can assure you that preparing for the exam did not impart any new knowledge, and passing the exam did not prove that I am more fully equipped to handle situations that I encounter all the time in my work. The best way to assess foundational social work skills is through practical experience, supervision, and mentorship. **The exam does not make anyone a better or more qualified social worker**. Instead, it imposes a financial burden on people who have already invested a great deal of money in higher education and possibly supervision.

Multiple other states have led the way in reducing the influence of harmful ASWB exams in their states. Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Utah, and Vermont have all paused or removed exam barriers since the ASWB data release in 2022, with multiple other states never having exams for the Bachelors and Masters license levels. **There is no evidence that lack of exams or exam removal have brought harm to the public**.

We have a wonderful opportunity to remove outdated, biased licensing models and instead **modernize the social work licensing process in our state to address our behavioral health workforce demands**. *Please find a favorable report on SB379*.

Thank you,
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