

Testimony in Opposition of Senate Bill 379
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
Submitted by: Dr. Shathea Blount, LCSW-C
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I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 379, which seeks to eliminate the examination requirement for bachelor's and master's level social work licensure. While I acknowledge the concerns regarding bias in the exam and disparities in pass rates, removing the exam entirely is an overcorrection that could have serious unintended consequences for both the profession and the communities we serve.

The licensure exam serves a critical purpose: to assess whether individuals entering the profession possess the foundational knowledge necessary to practice safely and ethically. Social workers provide services to vulnerable populations, and without a standardized measure of competency, we risk lowering the quality of care. The absence of an exam requirement may particularly have harmful effects in clinical settings, including both private practice and community-based work, for the following reasons:

Potential Risks to Public Safety and Ethical Standards

Social workers often handle complex cases involving mental health, trauma, and crisis intervention. The exam ensures that professionals entering the field have at least a minimum level of competency in core areas such as ethics, assessment, intervention, and legal responsibilities. Eliminating this requirement could result in inadequately prepared practitioners providing services to at-risk individuals, increasing the likelihood of harm.

Threats to Insurance Reimbursement and Professional Credibility

Many insurance companies require licensed social workers to meet specific competency standards, which typically include passing a national exam. If Maryland no longer mandates an exam for licensure, insurers may hesitate to reimburse services provided by bachelor's and master's level social workers, thereby limiting client access to care and reducing job opportunities for new graduates. This change could also have national implications, making it more difficult for Maryland social workers to obtain licensure in other states, which may still require an exam for reciprocity.

Undermining the Fight for Pay Parity

Social workers already face significant pay disparities compared to psychologists, despite performing comparable clinical duties in many settings. Eliminating the exam requirement may further weaken the profession's ability to advocate for fair compensation, as it may be perceived

as a dilution of professional standards rather than a step toward equitable access to licensure. Additionally, other professions, such as psychology, counseling, and nursing, maintain examination requirements as a safeguard for competency and professional integrity. If social work abandons this standard, it risks being devalued in interdisciplinary settings, making it even harder to argue for equal pay and professional recognition.

The bias in the licensure exam is a valid concern, but the solution should be to fix the exam, not eliminate it. Policy advocacy should move the profession forward, not backward. While I fully support addressing disparities in social work licensure, removing the exam requirement is a misguided approach that could have serious consequences for professional credibility, public trust, and access to equitable compensation. I urge you to vote against Senate Bill 379 and instead support initiatives that address the root causes of disparities in exam performance without compromising public safety or professional integrity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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