

January 31, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee,

I strongly oppose Senate Bill 379, which seeks to eliminate the examination requirement for bachelor's and master's social work licensure in Maryland. As a Maryland social work licensee with 25 years of experience, I have seen firsthand the importance of maintaining rigorous qualifications within the profession. My intersectional experiences have deepened my understanding of the critical role social workers play in serving Maryland's most vulnerable populations, and I believe strongly in preserving the qualifications that ensure competency and public trust in our profession.

Licensure exams are essential to ensuring that social workers possess the foundational knowledge and ethical competence necessary to meet the needs of clients. Eliminating this requirement compromises public trust, leaving clients uncertain about the qualifications of their providers. Clients have shared their concerns with me, voicing how critical it is for social workers to meet rigorous standards. It is clear that Maryland social workers serve the most fragile and vulnerable populations. The clients they support—whether in direct care or community settings—deserve social work services that are on par with other healthcare professions. No client in Maryland should be subjected to reduced qualifications for the professionals who serve them.

The data revealing disparities in exam pass rates highlights several systemic issues, including educational inequities, differences in access to resources, and potential biases in the exam design. Educational inequities reflect gaps in academic preparedness among students from diverse backgrounds. Access to resources reveals differences in financial ability to afford test preparation materials, courses, and exam fees. Systemic bias points to the potential for the exam to inadequately reflect the experiences of all test-takers. However, SB 379 contradicts these findings in significant ways. Rather than addressing the root causes of these disparities through targeted interventions—such as additional support and accessible test preparation—the bill eliminates the exam entirely. This approach fails to provide meaningful solutions to those facing barriers. Additionally, SB 379 bypasses efforts to improve educational systems and resources that could better prepare future social workers, leaving institutions and students without a clear pathway for validating competency. Finally, the bill misses an opportunity for reform, as it removes an essential assessment tool rather than working with licensing bodies to improve the exam process, such as increasing cultural sensitivity or exploring alternative testing methods. This could potentially weaken the profession's standards.

I've spoken with social work employers who have stated they would not hire LBSW or LMSW social workers who have not taken the licensing exam, as they do not want to be responsible for supervising individuals who haven't passed a basic competency test. If employers do hire social workers in this group, they will likely offer lower pay. Why would any employer offer the same salary for someone with fewer qualifications? Consider how social workers at prestigious institutions in Baltimore—such as advanced medical centers and VA facilities—might be viewed. Without a licensing exam, these social workers working alongside other highly qualified

healthcare professionals risk losing respect, responsibilities, and opportunities. If this happens, Maryland could end up creating a “separate but equal” system of social workers.

For these reasons, I urge the Maryland General Assembly to give an unfavorable report for Senate Bill 379 and instead focus on meaningful support for test-takers while preserving the licensing exam as a safeguard for public safety and professional excellence. Eliminating the exam threatens the integrity of social work and puts vulnerable clients at risk.

Lastly, as a member of the Maryland SB871 Workgroup for Social Work Requirements for Licensure, I need to point out that we did not fulfill all of the requirements of the bill – specifically this one:

(h) The Workgroup shall: (1) examine each type of license established under Title 19 of the Health Occupations Article by: (i) conducting a bias analysis of the qualifications for each type of license;

Therefore, the bias analysis could have helped identify any systemic barriers that might disproportionately affect certain groups, so its omission is a significant gap.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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