

As a Program Director of a behavioral health organization that serves over 5,000 individuals in Maryland and partners with over 300 public schools in Maryland, the one topic that repeatedly comes up in meetings around the state is **workforce shortage**. This is nothing new as this was a concern before the pandemic led to significant reduction in behavioral health professionals' capacity to manage the ever growing need in our communities.

Today, I received notice from a very qualified social work graduate, with years of experience and education under her belt, that she did not pass the social work exam so she is unable to obtain licensure. This will delay our organization's ability to initiate services for children with significant behavioral needs that place them at risk for out of school placements.

It is clear, that based on the data from ASWB that there would be an additional 1227 licensed social workers in Maryland, if every demographic group passed at same rate as white social workers.

- A portion of those 1227 social workers would join our child welfare partners and increase their ability to ensure safety for youth.
- A portion of those 1227 social workers would join our public school systems and help prevent and provide immediate response to students.
- A portion of those 1227 social workers would work in public mental health programs and provide much needed suicide screenings and interventions.
- The rest of the 1227 social workers would take on roles in hospitals, detention centers, and therapy practices helping to ensure that our communities have the supports they need to respond to those in crises.

Those 1227 social workers could be out there saving, and improving, the lives of Marylanders. In short, one major barrier to alleviating the significant behavioral health workforce shortage is the discrepancy in the exam.

As a social worker, I am also deeply committed to ensuring our workforce is one that is qualified to carry out the very important and life impacting work they are entrusted to carry out. I agree there needs to be standards in place for licensure.

- A review of the Maryland Social Work Board of Examiners website shows that numerous social workers have had revoked or probationary status on their licenses due to unethical behaviors in practice. They all previously passed the test.
- I have had the privilege to work with many who have struggled to pass the exam the first, second, third or fourth time. They are intelligent, skillful behavioral health professionals who I would entrust to work with my own family.

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. Because Illinois has some of the most easily accessible data and a slightly longer period of Masters level exam removal, they were studied in more detail in the Workgroup [final report](#) (page 36-37). Exam removal has had zero effect on the number of sanctions in that state.

I greatly respect our Maryland Social Work Board of Examiners and am proud to be a Maryland Social Worker. I am confident that this board can explore new ways of moving our profession forward in Maryland.

In short, the test does not accurately *measure* ones ability to be a professional social worker. Thank you for accepting my testimony. Please find a favorable report on SB379.

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