



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners
4201 Patterson Ave., 3rd Floor
Baltimore, MD 21215

2025 SESSION POSITION PAPER

BILL NO: SB 379
COMMITTEE: Finance
POSITION: Support with Amendments

TITLE: State Board of Social Work Examiners - Membership and Examination Requirements

BILL ANALYSIS: This bill repeals the examination requirements for bachelor and master social worker licenses and alters the number of consumer members on the State Board of Social Work Examiners.

POSITION AND RATIONALE: The Board of Social Work Examiners (“BSWE”) supports SB 379 with the following amendments:

Amendment 1

Page 2, lines 1 and 2, strike 14 and amend to 13; line 22 strike 4 and amend to 3.

Amendment 2

Page 2, line 23, add and amend the following language from HO Article §19-202(g)(5): Strike (i) and “Except as provided in subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph,”; Capitalize “a”; and strike (ii) in its entirety.

Amendment 3

Page 3, lines 7-8, strike the brackets.

Amendment 4

Page 3, lines 25-27 and Page 4, lines 1-11, strike in its entirety.

Amendment 5

Page 4, line 19, strike the brackets; lines 20-22, strike in its entirety.

The rationale for changing the number of consumer members from 14 to 13 (see **Amendment 1**) is that BSWE already has a high ratio of consumer to professional members. Upon review of

other health occupation Boards, BSWE has the 2nd highest ratio of consumer members. The BSWE highly values the input of consumer members and would welcome the addition of one additional consumer member which will also serve to make the Board composition an odd number, thereby facilitating voting.

Amendment 2 will ensure that all Board members are given the opportunity to serve 2 consecutive full terms.

Regarding **Amendments 3 and 5**, BSWE supports the passage of a national exam as a minimum requirement for licensure. This requirement is in line with the requirements of other health occupation boards at the Bachelors and Master's degree levels. BSWE is one of twenty State health occupation boards and is not alone in requiring a national exam as a minimum level of competency for licensure. Despite this fact, BSWE is the ONLY health occupation that is facing the prospect of licensing health professionals who have not passed a national exam.

The primary responsibility for any health occupation board in Maryland is to protect the citizens of the State:

“The mission of the health occupations boards is to protect the citizens of Maryland through the promotion of quality healthcare. This is achieved through maintenance of efficient licensure systems for healthcare professionals; promotion of disciplinary practices that contribute to an overall culture of accountability; education of clients and other stakeholders; and enforcement of applicable laws and statutes.”

-from Department of Budget & Management – Managing for Results FY 2025

BSWE recognizes and validates the high cost that many disenfranchised social workers paid because of the ASWB exam. While deeply troubling, we also applaud ASWB for being transparent with the data that showed what is true of many professional exams - they can sometimes be biased and discriminatory.

Social Workers provide much needed mental health services to individuals, couples, families and children in a variety of settings. Lowering the standards for the social work license will open the door to having a greater number of other licensed mental health professionals working in the wide variety of settings where mental health treatment are critical services. This includes correctional settings which have an overrepresentation of people of color and people with preexisting mental illnesses.

As a point of reference, when comparing the Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor (LGPC) licensure requirements with the Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) licensure requirements, the LGPC requires specific college clinical coursework; national exam; state jurisprudence exam; a Criminal History Background Check (CHBC); and three personal references. Current statutes for the LMSW require an MSW degree; CHBC; and the national exam - these are already below the eligibility requirements of a graduate counselor license.

For organizations providing mental health services, the LGPC is currently better prepared for behavioral health roles. Salaries for LMSWs who have not had the same rigorous clinical coursework preparation and who have also not passed a national exam will be further devalued in

behavioral health roles. Insurance companies will be justified in offering lower reimbursement rates for LMSWs.

BSWE supports the need for highly qualified social work professionals in a variety of settings. School social workers provide much needed mental health services directly to students. Hospital social workers work in complex medical systems with other health professionals. When standards are lowered for social workers, we are not only devaluing the profession; we are also devaluing the clients we serve.

SB 379 is a result of the Workgroup on Social Worker Requirements for Licensure (SB 871, Acts of 2023). BSWE's concerns about the Workgroup are documented in a letter dated April 26, 2024, which is a part of the Workgroup's Final Report package. In summary, BSWE was concerned that the Workgroup had limited discussion about the long-term professional impact of removing the exam. Additionally, the Workgroup did not seem willing to fairly acknowledge or assess changes the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) has been making to address the issues of the widely published study data.

Furthermore, recommendations from BSWE regarding reducing the barriers around testing were seemingly buried in the Final Report despite many of the members agreeing with these recommendations. Three changes recommended by BSWE were:

1. Reduce the amount of time before an individual can re-take the exam. (The current wait time in Maryland is 90 days) - *18 members agreed - 2 disagreed*
2. Wave fees for re-testing - *19 members agreed - 1 disagreed*
3. Individuals unsuccessful in passing the ASWB exam will only have to re-take the section(s) they did not pass (like the Certified Public Accountant Exam) - *19 members agreed - 1 disagreed.*

BSWE respectfully asks that consideration be given to changes that remedy the harm caused by multiple failures of the exam rather than throw out the exam completely. It is disheartening for Board staff to see applicants fail over and over. The financial toll exacted on these applicants is real. BSWE asks that it be given the ability to issue waivers or design and implement alternative pathways to licensure. For example, Wyoming limits the number of failures to three. After the third time, the applicant can submit a remediation plan to the Board and take the exam one more time.

<https://mentalhealth.wyo.gov/professionals-1/examination-information>

While much needed attention is given to the racial disparity rates around passing the exam, consideration should also be given to the passing rates of 1st time test takers versus repeat test takers. According to the 2023 Pass Rate from ASWB, for the LMSW exam, of the 960 first time test takers – 678 or 70.6% passed. Of the 686 repeat test takers – only 153 or 22.3% passed. Could efforts be made to address the issues of repeat test takers? Perhaps by offering help to them, we can equitably break down barriers to all who do not pass on the first try - regardless of race.

In the end, by discontinuing the exam requirement – we are telling the over 19,000 currently licensed social workers in Maryland who have already passed an exam for licensure that their efforts did not matter.

The reasoning for **Amendment 4** is that the Board no longer issues the “certified social worker” or LCSW license.

Thank you for considering this testimony. The Board of Social Work Examiners is respectfully requests a favorable vote on SB 379 with amendments.

If you require additional information please contact Karen Richards, Executive Director of the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners at (410) 764-4722 or karen.richards2@maryland.gov or Lillian Reese, Board Legislative Liaison, at (443) 794-4757 or lillian.reese@maryland.gov.

The opinion of the Board expressed in this document does not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.