

**House Bill 1521 State Board of Social Work Examiners –
Membership and Examination Requirements**
Health and Government Operations Committee
March 13, 2025
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 1521.

HB 1521 repeals the examination requirements for bachelor and master social worker licenses, which could help increase Maryland's social worker workforce by thousands.

Data from an [alarming new assessment](#) of Maryland's behavioral health workforce highlights an escalating crisis in access to mental health and substance use care. According to the report¹, which was completed pursuant to legislation the General Assembly passed in 2023 ([SB 283/HB 418](#)), the state's current behavioral health workforce is 50 percent smaller than necessary to meet today's demand and 45 percent of the existing workforce is expected to leave the field by 2028.

The scale of this workforce crisis is particularly striking among Maryland social workers. In 2023, there were an estimated 2,799 social workers employed in behavioral health settings. In order to meet the current demand and replace workers leaving the field, Maryland will need to attract an additional 2,675 social workers by 2028. This will be a tall challenge given recent graduation trends and employment patterns. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, degree completions from Maryland's social work master's programs have declined nine percent from their 2019 peaks. Further, only a small portion of graduates from behavioral health-related and nursing education programs actually work jobs in Maryland providing behavioral health services to residents. Seventy percent of Masters of Social Work and Clinical and Counseling Psychology graduates from Maryland universities since 2014 are either working in other industries in Maryland, are employed out of state, or not working one year after degree completion.

The General Assembly has taken several important steps in recent years to streamline the delivery of quality behavioral health care and bolster the state's behavioral health workforce, but we are not out of this crisis yet. HB 1521 has the potential to increase access to critical behavioral health services by expanding Maryland's social worker workforce by thousands. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

¹ *Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent*. Maryland Health Care Commission. October 2024.
https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865