

House Health & Government Operations Committee

March 13, 2025

House Bill 1521

State Board of Social Work Examiners - Membership and Examination Requirements

*****SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS*****

To the Honorable House Health and Government Operations Committee,

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is honored to have had the NASW Maryland chapter serve on the Maryland Department of Health Workgroup on Social Worker Requirements for Licensure. The final recommendations from this workgroup were instrumental in shaping House Bill 1521, and we are pleased to offer our full support for this legislation. This bill seeks to repeal the examination requirements for the Bachelor of Social Work (LBSW) and Master of Social Work (LMSW) licensure and adjust the composition of the State Board of Social Work Examiners. We believe these changes are critical to expanding access to social work licensure and strengthening the social work profession in Maryland.

NASW has long advocated for equity, diversity, and inclusion in social work. On February 3, 2023, we issued a press release opposing the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) licensing exams, which disproportionately disadvantage social workers of color, older adults, and non-native English speakers, based on data showing significant pass rate disparities. These exams limit the pool of qualified professionals serving diverse communities. We support removing ASWB exam requirements for LBSWs and LMSWs and are committed to exploring more inclusive competency evaluation methods to address the behavioral health workforce shortage and meet growing demand, especially in underserved areas. NASW chapters in Illinois and Colorado have already successfully passed similar legislation.

We urge adoption of the following proposed amendment to clarify that the examination for applicants for the BSW and MSW licenses will still be offered to those who choose to take it as discussed in the workgroup:

Amendment No. 1

On page 4, after line 29, insert:

§ 19-303

(a) To apply for a license, an applicant shall:

(1) Submit an application to the Board on the form that the Board requires; and

(2) Pay to the Board the application fee set by the Board.

(b) The Board shall:

(1) Review each application;

(2) Within 15 business days after the initial receipt of an application and after the receipt of supplemental documentation, notify the applicant of whether the application is complete; and

(3) [Notify each applicant whether the applicant has been approved to take the pertinent licensure examination] within 60 days from the date the Board received a completed application from the applicant, ISSUE:

(A) FOR LBSW AND LMSW APPLICANTS, A LICENSE AND A NOTIFICATION OF APPROVAL TO TAKE THE PERTINENT LICENSURE EXAMINATION, OR

(B) FOR LCSW-C APPLICANTS, A NOTIFICATION OF APPROVAL TO TAKE THE PERTINENT LICENSURE EXAMINATION.

The National Association of Social Workers national office and NASW-MD strongly supports House Bill 1521 with the above amendment and commends the sponsors for their leadership in addressing licensure barriers and promoting diversity and equity in the social work profession. We believe this legislation is a crucial step in strengthening Maryland's behavioral health workforce and ensuring that social service systems are better equipped to meet the needs of all Maryland residents.

We urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report on House Bill 1521 with the above amendment.**

Sincerely,

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National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Maryland Chapter

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