

To the Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Stacey Owens, and I am a licensed social worker in Maryland. I am asking that you vote no on HB 1521.

I am asking you to vote no on HB 1521 because I believe that lowering professional standards is especially concerning in a field that often serves people who are vulnerable. Consumers in Maryland deserve to be supported by social workers who meet the same professional standards as social workers in other states.

All other health professions in Maryland require an exam. Just like other health professions such as nurses and psychologists, the social work exam is created based on what those working in real life settings define as critical entry to practice knowledge. Even nursing assistants and massage therapists are required to take an exam, the functions that bachelors and masters social workers perform are no less valuable and should also have standards.

I understand that the reason behind exploring the elimination of exams is to increase the social work workforce. However, I urge you to consider the unintended consequences. Reducing licensure requirements diminishes parity with other health professions, threatens eligibility for licensure portability, and devalues the profession.

The bill presumes that competence is established solely through the completion of an education program. This diminishes the state's regulatory accountability. Education programs, though accredited, are varied in their instructional approaches and student experiences. A licensing exam, on the other hand, is a uniform, measure. I have personally been involved with the development of the ASWB exam as both a volunteer and consultant for over 15 years and have knowledge of the exam development process; there are many other Maryland social workers who are involved in this process.

I also understand concerns about ASWB's pass rate data by race. ASWB voluntarily released its own pass rate data as a baseline to looking at educational and social disparities as we all work toward equity. However, the response to that baseline data has been to throw out the baby with the bathwater and suggest reducing professional standards for social work, rather than taking a systematic widespread approach to supporting social workers in meeting professional standards. We must ask ourselves why we have not asked other health professions

to release their pass rate data, or why they have not released their data voluntarily. We must ask ourselves if this scenario presented itself with physicians, would the state of Maryland be in support of reducing licensure requirements for physicians? And if not, then why is the state of Maryland supporting the reduction of licensure requirements for social workers. Social work is also a valuable health profession that impacts lives.

In conclusion, I urge you to consider the unintended consequences of this bill. Social work is a valuable profession; an exam is a vital part of identifying that value and protecting the public by evaluating competency. I again ask that you vote no on HB 1521.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

-Stacey Owens, M.S.W., LCSW-C