March 11, 2025

Dear Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

I am a bilingual, Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical residing in Baltimore City. I am writing to request that you codify workgroup recommendations and **find a favorable report for HB1521 as introduced.** This bill will increase accountability to the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) by adding two more consumer members, and it will also create a more equitable path to social work without sacrificing social work competence.

In 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) released data that shows alarming disparities in pass rates of social work licensing exams. These disparities demonstrate lower pass rates in BIPOC, older, and multilingual social workers. According to ASWB's own data, first-time pass rates for white candidates are around **84%**, compared to **45%** for Black candidates and **64%** for Hispanic candidates. Additionally, pass rates go down as test taker age goes up. We know these disparities are not due to competence, but are inherent in the design of standardized testing, which has consistent bias against already marginalized groups.

In response to the data release, Maryland legislature passed a social work licensing workgroup in 2023, and it was signed into law. The workgroup started meeting in October 2023. **The workgroup overwhelmingly determined that removing the exam requirement at the Bachelors (LBSW) and Masters (LMSW) levels is the best way to move forward for our state**. The exam will still be available for those individuals that wish to take it.

As you evaluate this bill, I encourage you to consider the available data and factual evidence that support its intent. Below are just a few common misconceptions about the ASWB exam.

Myth: Removing this exam will put the public at risk.
Fact: There is no evidence that this exam measures social work competence or protects the public. Multiple states have taken the lead in expanding access to the workforce by removing exam barriers for Bachelor's and Master's level licensing requirements, allowing qualified individuals to enter the field. There is no evidence that social workers are less safe in such states nor have sanctions increased since exam removal, and there is plenty of data to show a marked increase in the social work workforce.

Myth: Removing the licensure exam for Bachelors and Masters Level Social Workers puts social work out of sync with other similar professions such as nursing, counseling, and psychology.
Fact: Social work is the only profession that requires multiple exams for multiple levels of licensure.

Myth: Test-takers just need better exam preparation and materials.
Fact: Test-takers spend hundreds of dollars and hours preparing for these exams. Despite this preparation, ASWB retake pass rates are notably low, indicating exam preparation plays only a small role in pass rates; a reliable and valid test should show higher pass rates the more someone studies. ASWB's own CEO stated that communities are at fault for low pass rates.

Maryland has long emphasized equity in a variety of other programs, and the field of social work should be a model of this. We have a wonderful opportunity to remove outdated, biased licensing models and instead modernize the social work licensing process in our state to address our behavioral health workforce demands. Thank you for your efforts in this important matter. **Please find a favorable report on HB1521 as introduced.**

Sincerely,

Lynn Panepinto, LCSW-C