

Dear Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee,

My name is **Phylicia Ross**, and I serve as the NAACP Appointee to the Maryland Workgroup on Social Work Licensure Requirements. I am here today to strongly urge you to **codify the Workgroup's recommendations and provide a favorable report on HB1521 as introduced**. This bill is necessary to increase accountability within the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) and to create an equitable licensing process that does not sacrifice Social Work competence.

As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and an active member of the Workgroup, I have spent months reviewing data, listening to expert testimony, and analyzing the current licensing process. What has been most striking in this process is the persistent failure of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) to provide any validating evidence that their exam is an objective measurement of competence. Despite multiple meetings and presentations, ASWB has not demonstrated that their proposed changes will meaningfully reduce racial and age disparities in pass rates.

The numbers speak for themselves: ASWB's own data shows that BIPOC, multilingual test-takers, and other marginalized groups also face significant barriers. If this were a matter of competence, these discrepancies wouldn't exist so predictably along these demographic lines. **We know this is a structural issue, not an individual failing.**

Beyond the inequities in pass rates, ASWB has failed in other critical ways:

- **No clear evidence has been presented on how the proposed changes (e.g., allowing section retakes, reducing answer choices) will close the achievement gap.**
- **There have been repeated inconsistencies in the proctoring and scoring of the test, further undermining its legitimacy.** Some examinees have even been given incorrect scores, and the process to address such errors remains opaque.
- **The cost and bureaucratic hurdles of the exam create unnecessary barriers** to an already stretched behavioral health workforce.

As a Social Worker who serves communities that have long been underserved by the mental health system, I have personally witnessed the consequences of this broken licensure system. **When competent and qualified Social Workers are systematically excluded from licensure, entire communities suffer.** Maryland is already facing a severe shortage of behavioral health professionals, and the current licensing model only exacerbates this crisis.

The Workgroup's overwhelming recommendation is clear: **Maryland must remove the ASWB exam requirement for the LBSW and LMSW levels and establish an alternative pathway for the LCSW-C.** This is not a radical idea—it is a necessary correction to a system that has already failed too many. States like Illinois, Minnesota, and Connecticut have already taken steps to move beyond ASWB's outdated model, and there is no evidence that removing these exams has harmed public safety.

Maryland has the opportunity to lead. We can prioritize **real-world experience, supervised practice, and competency-based assessments over a single flawed exam.** We can move toward a licensing process that reflects the values of the Social Work profession—equity, justice, and accessibility.

I urge you to support HB1521 as introduced and take the necessary steps to modernize Social Work licensure in Maryland. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive behavioral health workforce.

Sincerely,

Philicia Ross, LCSW-C

NAACP Appointee, Workgroup on Social Work Licensure Requirements