

March 11, 2025

To: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Dr. Samantha Fuld, DSW, MSW, LCSW-C, Clinical Assistant Professor, University of Maryland School of Social Work.

Re: HB1521 State Board of Social Work Examiners - Membership and Examination Requirements

Position: Favorable

I am a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work and a proud resident of Maryland (District 46). In this testimony I am speaking as an individual and NOT on behalf of my employer. However, I do have experience teaching hundreds of MSW students who are preparing for licensure and service as social workers in Maryland.

ASWB exam data released in August 2022, and what we know overwhelmingly about standardized testing (which has in recent years led [many universities to drop standardized testing requirements](#) as part of admissions criteria), demonstrates that the licensing exams required to enter the social work profession disproportionately keep people who are marginalized based on race, native language, disability, etc. from entering the profession. This is at a time when social workers are needed more than ever, particularly social workers whose identities represent those who are receiving services in the community. This is harmful to those individuals who must spend additional money and time re-taking the exam or shifting their professional aspirations and who experience numerous unjust disadvantages due to systemic bias. It is also harmful to Marylanders who need critical clinical services provided by licensed social workers.

Based on this data, several other states have already moved toward a licensing model that does not require standardized testing as a basis or requirement for licensing. As someone deeply involved in MSW education in Maryland, I urge you to vote favorably on this bill so our state can move in this direction as well. Our MSW and BSW programs must adhere to rigorous [Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards](#) put forth by the Council on Social Work Education. Students are assessed for core competencies across the curriculum as well as in internships that require real-world experiential learning in community-based social work contexts. The skills needed for competent and effective social work practice are relational and truly cannot be measured through a standardized test. Successfully obtaining a MSW or BSW degree from an accredited institution should assure the state that a social worker is qualified for licensure.

As an instructor, in the past several years I have adjusted my exams and assessments to favor a more narrative approach that is not time-limited. The reason I've done this is that it was clear to

me that exceptional students, who I know from their engagement in class exercises, activities, and experiential learning are highly competent future social workers, don't always "test" well. Performance on a timed multiple-choice test cannot capture relevant skills for engagement, assessment, treatment planning, practice interventions, and evaluation. I've adjusted my assessment strategies to better account for this and I hope that the state will too.

Additionally, please consider that a private company, [PSI](#), profits from the administration of social work licensing exams and thus has a financial stake in maintaining them and trying to convince both social workers and legislators of their importance.

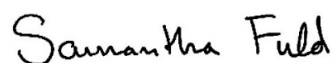
I do understand that there is concern amongst some that removing testing as a requirement for licensure would diminish the reputation of new licensees in comparison to those who were required to pass the test. The data has been clear - this test is not measuring competence. We should not stall progress for fear of unreasonable social hierarchies and biases. It will be our job as a profession to ensure that the community, organizations, and previously licensed social workers understand the need for this change and rightly value the educational credentials of a BSW or MSW in their own right.

Additionally, I recognize that there have been promises to update the test itself to reduce bias and convince legislators of its continued importance. We must be clear that the process of updating and testing an exam to minimize or eliminate bias would take years to do well and will likely not produce the desired results (given that we know standardized testing is so flawed). There are likely biases that were not even uncovered in the initial 2022 research findings – for example they did not include attention to disability status, which given the cumbersome nature of requesting accessibility accommodations for the exam, likely represents another disparity. Adjusting the exam is not a reasonable option while Marylanders and social workers in Maryland continue to be negatively impacted.

I urge you to vote favorably on HB1521 and ensure that a biased test is no longer able to prevent qualified MSWs and BSWs from obtaining licensure in Maryland.

Respectfully,

Dr. Samantha Fuld, DSW, MSW, LCSW-C

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha Fuld". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.