

**Testimony for SB 18  
State Board of Social Work Examiners – Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions  
Support with Amendments**

Thank you, Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Finance Committee for addressing this important issue and recognizing the vital role of social workers in Maryland. As dean of the University of Maryland, School of Social Work, I appreciate the opportunity to support all efforts to remove the licensing exam requirement for entry-level licensure: *Licensed Bachelor of Social Work* (LBSW) or *Licensed Masters Social Worker* (LMSW).

In 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards released data revealing troubling disparities in exam pass rates among racial groups, particularly for Black test takers. Other groups, including older adults and those for whom English is not their primary language, also faced lower pass rates. These disparities were found across the country and highlighted systemic inequities in the exam. These inequities also compound an already severe workforce shortage. Removing the exam requirement is a step toward equity.

We thank the sponsor, Senator Washington, for her leadership and commitment to strengthening Maryland's behavioral health and social work workforce through SB 18. Her efforts to reduce unnecessary barriers to licensure and to promote equity within our profession are both timely and deeply needed.

With these inequities and barriers in mind, I strongly support the elimination of the entry-level licensing exam for Licensed Bachelor and Licensed Master Social Workers. The exam has become a significant and unnecessary barrier to entry into the profession, particularly for candidates from historically marginalized communities, older graduates, and those for whom English is not a primary language. Removing this requirement is an important step toward building a more diverse, culturally responsive, and sustainable workforce for Maryland.

I also support the intent of SB 18 to expand access to licensure through alternative pathways and appreciate Senator Washington's openness to stakeholder input as this legislation moves forward. With that spirit of collaboration in mind, I respectfully offer several observations for consideration.

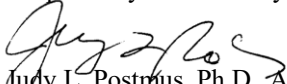
First, while I support the creation of an alternative pathway through supervised experience, modest flexibility in the statutory language would help ensure that existing safeguards—such as background checks and licensing complaint reviews—remain intact. Changing “shall” to “may” would keep these safeguards in place. This balance is important for both public protection and professional integrity. Second, clarifying supervisory responsibilities may help avoid unintended consequences. Without careful framing, well-qualified supervisors may be discouraged from mentoring conditional license holders, which could limit access to high-quality supervision for new practitioners. Third, preserving provisions that allow the Board to respond to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. another pandemic), as was done in prior legislation, would strengthen the state's ability to adapt during future emergencies. Finally, allowing sufficient time for thoughtful rulemaking and stakeholder engagement will be essential to ensuring that these changes are implemented effectively and sustainably. Please see the attached amendments for your consideration.

Maryland's social work programs are rigorous and comprehensive, preparing graduates through extensive coursework, supervised practica, and ongoing evaluation. Our graduates are ready to serve, particularly in high-need and underserved communities. By eliminating the entry-level exam and refining SB 18 to support strong implementation, we can remove unnecessary barriers while maintaining high professional standards.

I am deeply grateful for Senator Washington's leadership and commitment to advancing equitable, evidence-informed policy. I would welcome the opportunity to continue working with her to strengthen our workforce and expand access to care for Marylanders.

Thank you again for your dedication to this important issue. I respectfully request a favorable committee report inclusive of the proposed amendments.

Respectfully submitted by



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Cc: Senator M. Washington

**Suggested amendments proposed in support of SB 18**  
**State Board of Social Work Examiners – Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions.**

1. Preserve the conditional license for unforeseen circumstances

In 2024, a bill passed allowing the BSWE to issue *conditional licenses* when an unforeseen circumstance results in the unavailability of the exam. Removing this provision entirely could leave the state unprepared for future emergencies, such as an epidemic. Rather than eliminating this option, the bill could rename or reframe the license described in SB 18 to align with similar *temporary* or *limited* licenses used in other health occupations statutes and leave the term “conditional license” as defined in 2024 to respond to an unforeseen emergency.

2. Clarify that the alternative pathway is only available for entry level social work LBSW and LMSW licenses.

Page 2 line 28: *May only be issued to an applicant applying for a LBSW or LMSW license.*

3. Clarify the alternative pathway based on 1,500 hours of supervised experience

Allow the Board flexibility to use other requirements currently in statute when issuing a *full license* after the completion of the 1,500 hours of supervised experience rather than solely on the number of hours accrued. For example, results of a criminal history background check or licensing violation.

Page 3 line 15: The Board MAY (not shall) issue a full license...

4. Clarify supervisor liability

Identifying supervising social workers as jointly responsible for ensuring compliance with conditional licensure requirements could unintentionally discourage qualified supervisors from supervising social workers with conditional licensees. Clarifying that the primary responsibility for compliance rests with the conditional license holder would help mitigate this risk. Existing regulations already establish detailed supervision requirements and responsibilities, which would also apply to supervising an individual with a conditional license.

Page 3 lines 11-14: (D) A HOLDER OF A CONDITIONAL LICENSE UNDER THIS SECTION ~~(AND THE SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER ARE JOINTLY)~~ **IS** RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH THE SUPERVISION AND EXPIRATION REQUIREMENTS ...

5. Allow adequate time for implementation

SB 18 requires the BSWE to create regulations for the new licensing category. Given the scope and complexity of these changes, implementation will likely require more time than an emergency bill allows. A delayed effective date would better support thoughtful rulemaking and stakeholder input to ensure the new system is implemented effectively.