

February 10, 2026

Testimony for Senate Finance Committee

Re: SB0018 State Board of Social Work Examiners - Conditional License to Practice Social Work - Revisions

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report on SB18, along with several amendments that would strengthen the bill's effectiveness and ensure consistent implementation.

Maryland is currently facing both a mental health workforce shortage and growing demand for behavioral health services. **SB18 offers a practical and evidence-based solution.**

Pathways to Housing DC opened in 2004 when we brought the Housing First model to Washington, DC. We were thrilled to expand our services into Montgomery County, MD in 2018 with the receipt of a five-year innovation grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that we called "Pathways Home". Using a client-centered approach, our efforts target Montgomery County's residents experiencing homelessness who are living with substance use and/or co-occurring mental health disorders whose service needs are not being met by existing programs. We have significantly expanded our outreach and housing programs in Montgomery County, including serving youth through outreach and running MoCo Reconnect - the only homeless drop-in center serving young adults aged 16-24 in the County.

We have directly witnessed how the barrier of ASWB exams has harmed our staff and clients, compromised our programs and services, and prevented full use of available housing resources. As an employer of social workers, **Pathways to Housing DC is absolutely thrilled at the potential of hiring qualified social workers through this legislation.** We look forward to the passing of this legislation to increase our access to qualified social workers and expand our services in Maryland.

Based on a dramatic increase in need, particularly among youth, we are in the process of growing our outpatient mental health clinic. However, the success of this endeavor is highly dependent on hiring social work staff. Passing this legislation will greatly support this growth and fill staffing needs across the state of Maryland. Annually, we host 3 MSW interns with our community based mental health programs in Montgomery County. Our goal is to retain those interns as staff in our Montgomery County programs. At present, there is a significant risk that despite our investment in these interns, they will seek licensure and employment in Washington, DC instead of Maryland. Passing this legislation will provide a pathway for all Maryland social workers to remain Maryland social workers, ensuring that our efforts will benefit Maryland into the future.

To further strengthen the bill and ensure clear, consistent implementation, I respectfully request consideration of the following amendments:

- Rename the alternative pathway “Practice-Based Licensure” to accurately reflect that it confers all full professional rights and responsibilities of social work licensure.
- Allow up to four years to complete the required 1,500 hours of supervised practice. This flexibility recognizes common life circumstances that may temporarily affect hours worked while maintaining the total supervision requirement.
- Ensure supervisor responsibilities are identical for both practice-based and examination pathways.
- Specific language that allows supervised practice hours accrued during this period to count toward future independent licensure requirements.
- Maintain confidentiality of pathway status between the licensee and the Board.
- Require annual BSWE reporting on licensure numbers and disciplinary outcomes by pathway to support transparent, data-driven evaluation of the policy’s impact.

Thank you for your consideration of SB18 and for your continued commitment to building Maryland’s behavioral health workforce. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,



Christy Respress, MSW
President & CEO