



**Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee
March 3, 2026**

Senate Bill 874 - Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scopes of Practice

SUPPORT with AMENDMENTS

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our concerns with the way Senate Bill 874 is written and offer an amendment.

Scope of practice laws govern public protection, workforce pathways, supervision, and liability. When legislation rewrites major portions of a profession's practice act without structured input from the licensing board, schools of social work, and professional associations, it is deeply concerning.

Scope of practice is not minor statutory language and NASW Maryland believes to tackle the important task of updating this law entirely through amendments to SB 874 in the short time remaining in session is not realistic. The number of structural changes in SB 874 makes this more than a technical cleanup or update. It is essentially a reworking of the framework of social workers' scope of practice. That requires thoughtful collaboration, not patchwork revisions under time pressure.

Historically, changes to the Social Work Practice Act have involved collaboration among the Board, associations, and educators. The issue here is not that change was proposed, it is that the profession was not meaningfully engaged in drafting it. We support an effort that gathers these crucial stakeholders to take on this task, giving it the time and thought needed to ensure there are no unintended consequences, and to take into account the evolution of Maryland's Health Occupations Title 19. History matters, and to disregard "how" and "why" items are in the Code ignores important lessons learned.

SB 874 makes sweeping structural and definitional changes that create confusion, undo carefully negotiated statutory updates from recent years, and risks unintended harm to multiple segments of the profession particularly macro and advanced generalist social workers. Here are some examples of what SB 874 does:

- Revises the statutory definition of the "practice of social work" in a way that removes key references to CSWE-accredited degrees, supervision, and the full breadth of macro practice, potentially narrowing how the profession is framed in law;

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- Eliminates explicit language affirming that social workers may provide counseling for alcohol, substance use, and addictive behaviors language that was added in 2020 to resolve prior ambiguity;
- Removes existing prohibitions preventing LBSWs and LMSWs from serving as sole owners of private practices, creating uncertainty about legislative intent and potentially altering long-standing safeguards;
- Revises the definition of “independent practice” and deletes references to bachelor’s- and master’s-level distinctions that were recently added to statute, creating confusion about scope boundaries;
- Removes language allowing LMSWs to formulate diagnoses under the supervision of an LCSW-C, raising concerns about how clinical competencies will be developed during supervised practice;
- Deletes all statutory references to the LCSW license category without clarifying how currently licensed LCSWs will be treated moving forward;
- Removes the express authority of LCSW-Cs to petition for emergency psychiatric evaluations, limiting an important crisis intervention responsibility;
- Deletes foundational language stating that licensees may practice only within the scope of the specific category of license issued, potentially weakening clear scope-of-practice guardrails.

We are appreciative that the sponsor is welcoming of amendments, but draft amendments in response to some of the concerns above have resulted in even more concerns. Time needs to be given to ensuring language is consistent, references to other parts of the Code are appropriate, and other items have not been left out. Above all, scope must stay intact at all licensure levels.

Our amendment would be to strike the specifics of the bill and require the convening of the social worker licensing board, social worker associations, and social worker institutions of higher education to take on the task of updating Title 19 of the Health Occupations Code, with a goal of having legislation introduced in the Maryland General Assembly in January of 2027. NASW Maryland would be more than happy to take a lead role in that effort, with or without legislation.

Respectfully,

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