



**Senate Finance Committee
February 10, 2026**

**Senate Bill 18 – Conditional Licensure and
Alternative Pathway to Social Work Licensure**

Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 18 with amendments. NASW-MD believes the goal of SB 18 is an important step toward strengthening Maryland’s social work workforce while continuing to protect the public.

NASW believes that current licensure requirements create unnecessary barriers that limit who is able to enter and remain in the social work profession. In 2023, NASW publicly opposed the Association of Social Work Boards licensing exams after data showed clear disparities in pass rates for social workers of color, older applicants, and individuals for whom English is not a first language. These differences do not reflect a lack of skill or competence. Instead, they reflect structural barriers that reduce access to licensure and shrink the workforce Maryland needs.

Other jurisdictions have already taken a different approach. The District of Columbia, for example, has modernized social work licensure by making exams optional at the bachelor’s and master’s levels. NASW believes Maryland should consider this kind of approach, as social workers at the bachelor’s and master’s levels practice under supervision. This structure both strengthens the workforce and protects the public.

Based on SB 18 as introduced, NASW-MD supports some changes to strengthen and clarify the bill. We recommend clearly stating whether conditional licensure is intended to be an ongoing alternative pathway rather than only an emergency measure. We also recommend specifying which license levels are eligible—such as LBSW and LMSW—and clarifying that this pathway does not apply to independent clinical licensure (LCSW-C).

NASW-MD further believes the required 1,500 hours of supervised experience should be tied to competency-based standards established by the Board through regulation. Clear rules for documentation, verification, and supervision will ensure consistency, protect supervisors, and maintain public trust. Allowing implementation to begin after regulations are adopted would also support effective and responsible rollout.

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Maryland is facing a serious behavioral health workforce shortage, especially in underserved and rural communities. NASW believes SB 18 can help address this shortage by retaining qualified graduates and allowing them to enter the workforce sooner, without lowering professional standards or risking public safety. SB 18 responds to this problem by allowing a supervised, practice-based pathway to licensure. NASW believes competence should be demonstrated through real-world practice under supervision, not through a single high-stakes exam. Social workers at the bachelor's and master's levels already practice under supervision, making these levels especially appropriate for alternative pathways that emphasize training, oversight, and accountability.

NASW-MD supports SB 18 and looks forward to working with the sponsor, the Board of Social Work Examiners, and the Committee on amendments to ensure this legislation is clear, effective, and equitable.

Sincerely,

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