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Senate Finance Committee

3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Honorable Chair Beidle and members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Nicki James, and I am a class of 2026 social work student at McDaniel College in Carroll County, Maryland. As someone preparing to enter this profession, I strongly support SB18.

One of the biggest concerns for me is the evidence that the current licensure exam is biased. The ASWB data shows clear racial disparities in pass rates, which suggests the exam may be testing more than just professional knowledge. Social work is built on the values of equity and social justice, so it's hard to reconcile those values with a system that disproportionately keeps people of color out of the profession. The NASW Code of Ethics emphasizes our responsibility to challenge social injustice and discrimination, and I see licensure reform as part of that responsibility.

There are serious workforce shortages in Maryland, especially in mental health and child welfare. Communities already struggle to access services, and delaying licensure for qualified graduates only makes that worse. As a student from a rural area, it's frustrating to think that people who are ready to help could be held back by a single standardized test, especially when people in crisis are waiting for services.

Representation in social work matters, and I see the lack of representation around me. The NASW Code of Ethics highlights the dignity and worth of every person and the importance of cultural competence. I find it strange when a group of social workers who all look like me, a white woman, are meant to serve diverse communities. When licensure barriers reduce diversity in the field, it limits our ability to serve communities in culturally responsive ways. Reforming licensure pathways would help the profession better reflect the communities we serve.

I also support the emphasis on supervised practice as an alternative pathway to licensure. Social work competence is built through training, mentorship, and

real-world experience, not just test performance. The Code of Ethics stresses competence and ongoing professional development, and supervised practice aligns closely with how social workers actually learn to practice ethically and effectively.

Finally, licensure delays don't just affect students, they affect clients. When graduates can't get licensed, communities lose access to services, and vulnerable populations are left with fewer supports. Reforming the system would help get qualified social workers into the field faster while still maintaining accountability and professional standards.

Overall, as a social work student at McDaniel College, I see SB18 as a step toward a more equitable, inclusive, and ethical licensure system. It works to build towards a system that reflects the core values of our profession and better serves both future social workers and the communities we want to help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicole James