

Senate Finance Committee

Maryland Senate Bill 0018 (SB 18) State Board of Social Work Examiners - Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions

****Oppose****

February 6, 2026

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Dionne Brown-Bushrod. I am a Maryland Licensed Certified Clinical Social Worker (LCSW-C) born and raised in Northeast Baltimore City and currently residing in Randallstown, Baltimore County. I submit this written testimony in **strong opposition to Maryland Senate Bill 0018 (SB 18) State Board of Social Work Examiners - Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions**. SB 18 significantly weakens the role of the licensing exam by allowing extended practice without passing a standardized examination.

Throughout the State's and country's history, justice has been sought against discriminatory practices in education, training, and professional practice. Baltimorean and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall championed the notion that justice is not served through "separate but equal" measures. It is proven that such measures create further division and harmful consequences for generations to come.

SB 18 risks reinforcing a racialized narrative that lower standards are an acceptable substitute for addressing inequitable access to preparation and support.

Over several decades ago, the social work profession won a hard fight to compete and to be respected alongside other Maryland health occupations that demonstrate competency and public trust through the rigor of licensing standards for experience, education, and examination. Exposing social work to an optional exam pathway will cause the public and other healthcare professionals to doubt the social work licensees' credibility.

The social work licensing exam is the only standardized, psychometrically validated, uniform assessment used to verify minimum competence. If enacted, this bill creates a second-tiered system by allowing individuals to practice at the bachelor's and master's level without demonstrating minimum competency through a standardized exam. Given we know disparity exists in society, this bill amplifies and further implants the unequal access to resources, education, experience and encouragement found in social work education programs and working experiences.

If these concerns do not give you pause, consider the consequences of the personal and professional experience for social workers who have experienced marginalization in their lived experience.

- LBSWs and LMSWs are legally required to practice under supervision. Without an exam verifying their baseline competency, many supervisors will hesitate to put their own

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licenses at risk by supervising untested licensees. Standardized credentials give social workers of color access to gatekept spaces.

- I began my social work career at Spring Grove Hospital Center, working alongside psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses. I later served as a social worker at Sheppard Pratt. Can you imagine how I would have been treated as a Black woman social worker if I lacked the same licensure qualifications as my colleagues? Being a good person and trying your best is not what makes a profession; credentials matter and the road to credentials matter.
- We are in a climate where employers will likely perceive untested social workers as less qualified and higher-risk hires, leading to lower pay and fewer job opportunities compared to their peers in healthcare who meet exam-based qualifications.
- If SB 18 is passed, the practical distinction between unlicensed human service workers and the exam optional bachelor category licensed social workers will be significantly blurred because both entry qualifications will have exam optional requirements.
- If this bill is meant to address social justice, then I must ask: where is the full complement of social justice initiatives? Are we truly making meaningful changes, or are we legislating performative, feel-good action instead of substantive cultural reform in the State? Eliminating the exam does not solve systemic disparities. It ignores bias in education, access to resources, and structural inequities from preschool through graduate school.
- Every social worker should take the licensing exam because the public expects a minimum, verifiable set of qualifications. In healthcare occupations, licensure examinations are not optional. The 2023 Senate Bill 283 created a statewide needs assessment of the behavioral healthcare workforce, and while that assessment confirmed significant workforce shortages, no other Maryland healthcare profession has responded to those shortages by eliminating or bypassing standardized licensure examinations.

SB 18 will ultimately disenfranchise the social work profession, especially marginalized licensees who will face even greater challenges without a recognized and respected licensure process. How is that justice?

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **oppose Senate Bill 18**.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dionne Brown-Bushrod, MSW, LCSW-C