



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

Bill Title: State Board of Social Work Examiners –
Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions

Bill Number(s): SB0018

Position: FAVORABLE

Date: February 6, 2026

Submitted by: Jeremy Browning, Director of the
Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

To:

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The Hon. Brian J. Feldman, Chair
The Hon. Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs:

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 18, which modernizes and expands Maryland's conditional licensure pathway for social workers by creating clear, supervised routes to full licensure while strengthening accountability and workforce stability.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs was created by the General Assembly to assess challenges facing LGBTQIA+ Marylanders and to inform the Executive and Legislative branches on policies that advance equity, access, and well-being. Access to a qualified, stable, and culturally responsive behavioral health workforce is central to this mission.

SB18 addresses a real and pressing workforce challenge. Maryland, like much of the country, is experiencing a shortage of licensed social workers, particularly in behavioral health, child welfare, school-based services, and community mental health settings. These shortages disproportionately impact LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially transgender and nonbinary people, who already face barriers to affirming and accessible care.

The urgency of strengthening Maryland's behavioral health workforce is further reinforced by preliminary findings from the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs' statewide Community Needs Assessment, which will be published in a forthcoming report. Among respondents, more than 22% reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months, and over 61% reported experiencing suicidal ideation at some point in their lifetime. Moreover, past research has consistently found that violence and discrimination are consistently associated with negative

mental health outcomes such as suicidal ideation,¹ and social workers are often especially well-positioned to support LGBTQIA+ people in navigating experiences of identity-based harm. These findings underscore the critical importance of ensuring timely access to qualified, supervised social workers across the State.

By requiring the State Board of Social Work Examiners to issue a conditional license to otherwise qualified applicants and by establishing two clear pathways to full licensure, either through examination or through the completion of 1,500 hours of supervised practice, SB18 ensures that trained professionals are not sidelined by administrative delays or rigid pathways that do not reflect real-world workforce needs.

Importantly, SB18 maintains appropriate safeguards. Conditional license holders must practice within the scope of their license category, under Board-approved supervision, and for a defined, nonrenewable period. The bill also strengthens oversight by requiring annual reporting on outcomes and workforce impact, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement.

For LGBTQIA+ Marylanders, access to social workers who understand trauma, identity-based stressors, family rejection, and systemic discrimination can be life-saving. Delays in licensure and workforce shortages limit access to these critical services, particularly in rural areas and underserved communities. SB18 helps address these gaps while preserving professional standards and public protection.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 18.

¹ Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2023). Minority stress theory: Application, critique, and continued relevance. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 51(101579), 101579. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2023.101579>