

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

February 6, 2026

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the proposed bill to remove the social work licensing examination requirement in Maryland.

I offer this testimony as a social worker with ten years of experience who is still learning and growing in my career and deeply invested in the integrity, equity, and future of this profession. I chose social work because of its commitment to dignity, justice, and accountability—values that should guide any reform to licensure.

This bill is framed as a workforce solution, yet social workers in Maryland have long asked for support in ways that this proposal does not address: fair compensation, job stability, supervision access, educational equity, and professional respect. Removing a licensure exam does not solve workforce shortages, it avoids the systemic issues that create them.

I am particularly concerned by the narrative that eliminating the exam will reduce bias. Disparities in exam outcomes reflect inequities in education, preparation, and access—not necessarily an inability of social workers to meet standards. As a Black social worker, I find it deeply troubling to imply that Black professionals cannot pass the exam. We can, and we do. Many of the strongest advocates for this bill have passed it themselves. The problem is not the existence of a standard—it is unequal access to reaching it.

In addition, social work should not be the first behavioral health profession to weaken licensure requirements while others continue to uphold them. Counselors, psychologists, nurses, and even non-clinical professionals such as project managers are required to pass standardized exams. Lowering standards risks further marginalizing social work in a system where the profession already struggles to be seen, valued, and compensated equitably—while strengthening parallel professions that offer similar services.

Lastly, Gatekeeping does not have standards. Gatekeeping is limiting access to them. Workforce growth comes from investment, not dilution. If the goal is access and equity, then the solution is to improve the systems around licensure, not manipulate exam requirements. ASWB has already made progress with improving access through accommodations.

Again, I am opposed to this bill. Please vote no for Senate Bill SB18

Sincerely,

Brittany Duke, LCSW-C, LICSW