

**To:** Maryland Senate Finance Committee **Re:** SB0018 — State Board of Social Work Examiners – Provisional License Established (Amended) **Position:** UNFAVORABLE **Submitted by:** Philicia Ross, LCSW-C, NAACP Appointee, Maryland Workgroup for Social Work Licensure Requirements

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Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as Philicia Ross, LCSW-C, and the NAACP's appointed representative to the Maryland Workgroup for Social Work Licensure Requirements. The NAACP appointed me to that Workgroup because what happens to Black Social Workers in this state is a civil rights issue. I want that on the record before I say anything else.

SB0018, as amended, is not the bill Maryland Social Workers asked for. I am submitting an unfavorable position.

The provisional license created under §19-309.2 still requires passage of the ASWB exam to convert to a full license. There is no practice-based alternative under that track. A Social Worker who cannot pass the exam now will hold a time-limited license that expires in 12 to 24 months, and still goes nowhere. No employer is building a position around that. This pathway exists on paper. That is all.

The conditional license under §19-309.1 includes a supervised-hours pathway. 1,500 hours, verified by a Board-approved supervisor. That is closer to what was asked for. But the hours only count when evaluated in accordance with standards set in consultation with a CSWE-accredited institution that offers both a bachelor's and a master's degree. That is a restriction that limits who actually benefits. And neither license qualifies the holder for the interstate compact, which matters in a state that is already losing approximately 70% of its Maryland-educated Social Workers to other states.

This committee has heard these numbers before. A 48.5% master's-level pass rate. A 47.6% bachelor's-level pass rate. A 23.3% repeat pass rate for master's-level candidates. Those are not abstractions. Those are people who finished their degrees, completed their field hours, and were told they still were not enough.

I sat on the Workgroup for over a year. We reviewed the evidence. We heard from practitioners, educators, employers, and community members. We voted 19 to 4 to recommend removing the exam requirement at the LBSW and LMSW levels and creating real alternative pathways. The only members who voted no were those affiliated with the entities that administer and profit from the exam. That vote was a clear answer to the question this legislature asked us.

SB0018 as amended is not that answer.

I am a practicing LCSW-C. I know what it costs to move through this system. I know what it takes to sit for an exam that has a documented racial disparity baked into its outcomes, that has never been proven to predict clinical competence, and that a growing number of states have already walked away from. I did not come to this work from the outside. I came to it because I watched what this exam does to people who are fully capable of serving their communities, only to be turned away anyway.

What disappoints me most is not the bill. It is the pattern. Social Workers show up. We testify. We sit on workgroups. We produce data. We compromise. We come back. And then a body of legislators who have not taken this exam, have not failed this exam, and have not left this state because of this exam, decides it knows better than the people who lived it.

That is not how policy is supposed to work. Especially not in Social Work Month.

I urge an unfavorable report on SB0018 as amended.

Respectfully submitted,

**Philicia Ross, LCSW-C**, NAACP Appointee, Maryland Workgroup for Social Work Licensure Requirements