

Testimony in Opposition to HB 769

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bynia Reed. I am a Black woman, a Maryland licensed clinical social worker, and for nearly two decades I have served as a consultant with the Association of Social Work Boards, including as an item writer, exam committee member and co-chair, consultant to item writers, and current form review volunteer. I am speaking on my own behalf in opposition to House Bill 769 as written.

I believe in equity and in public protection. We must address disparities in our profession. However, HB 769 applies a blunt tool to a complex issue. As a solution-focused practitioner, here are my concerns as well as a proposed solution:

1. The Bill Misdiagnoses the Workforce Problem

- This bill assumes eliminating the licensing exam will resolve workforce shortages.
- It is unclear what specific shortage this addresses- DCF staffing, rural access, supervision bottlenecks, reimbursement barriers, or retention?
- A statewide elimination of the exam is not a targeted reform.

Licensure standards should not be broadly altered without a clearly defined policy objective.

2. Risk to the Social Work Licensure Compact

- The Social Work Compact requires exam-based licensure.
- Eliminating the exam jeopardizes Maryland's full participation.
- Loss of Compact eligibility reduces portability and earning potential for Maryland social workers.

Maryland should not weaken interstate mobility or isolate its workforce.

3. Equity Requires Upstream Solutions

Pass rate disparities are deeply concerning to me. But eliminating the exam does not address:

- Educational inequities long before graduate school
- Unequal access to strong field placements
- Financial barriers to test preparation
- Supervision access and cost

The exam functions as a thermometer. It reflects inequities that exist long before test day. Removing the thermometer does not resolve them.

If equity is the goal, targeted reforms include:

- Paid field placements
- Supervision stipends
- Exam fee assistance and assistance with test prep
- Structured mentorship and preparation support

These remove barriers without weakening licensure standards.

4. The Passing Score Question

Much testimony referenced missing the passing score by one or two points.

Every competency exam requires a defensible cutoff. Lowering the score by one point will still leave candidates missing by one point. Standards cannot be adjusted indefinitely based on proximity to the cutoff.

The solution to narrow misses is preparation and support- not elimination of the minimum competency requirement.

5. A Better Path Forward- Create a Distinct Credential

If Maryland determines that an additional workforce pathway is necessary, it should create a distinct credential rather than lowering standards for licensed social workers statewide.

Such a credential could include:

- A separate title that does not use “social worker”, such as “Registered Service Worker” (West Virginia) or the Proposed “Social Service Worker” credential (Massachusetts model)
- A defined scope of practice
- Clearly defined supervision and training standards
- Transparency to the public

Other states have taken this approach, preserving the integrity of licensed social workers while addressing specific workforce needs.

If two pathways exist under the same LBSW or LMSW title, the public cannot distinguish between them. Regulatory clarity matters.

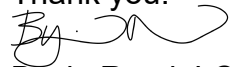
Conclusion

HB 769 applies a blunt tool to a complex workforce and equity challenge. It risks weakening licensure clarity, creating public confusion, and jeopardizing Compact participation.

Maryland can expand opportunity without diluting professional standards. A separate, distinct, and clearly-defined credential offers a more precise and responsible path forward.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 769 as written.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bynia", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Bynia Reed, LCSW-C