

Dear Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the House Health Committee:

I submit this testimony in strong support of HB0769 as a proud social worker who believes deeply in the profession and equally believes that we must be honest about what is not working. Maryland is facing a behavioral health crisis and a workforce shortage at the same time. Yet we continue to block educated, trained, and capable Master's-level social workers from fully participating in the workforce because of a standardized exam that does not reflect the realities of social work practice. This is not a matter of lowering standards. It is a matter of recognizing that a single test should not define a professional's competence, ethics, or value. There is an unspoken truth within this profession: many social workers who have passed the licensing exam have later demonstrated poor judgment, unethical behavior, and incompetence—some of whom appear on public disciplinary lists maintained by licensing boards. Meanwhile, many highly skilled clinicians struggle with the exam despite excelling in real-world practice. Passing a test has never been a guarantee of safe, ethical, or effective social work. Social work is not practiced in controlled environments. In real life, we are not handed multiple-choice options. We respond to crisis, trauma, grief, poverty, racism, domestic violence, and systems that consistently fail the people we serve. The “book” assumes order, predictability, and time. Social work happens in disorder, urgency, and uncertainty. Competence is demonstrated through supervision, ethics, decision-making, and lived practice—not test-taking ability. HB0769 is not an attack on the LCSW or examination-based licensure. It is an acknowledgment that Master's-level social workers deserve a pathway to work, earn income, and serve their communities without being told that an exam defines their worth. A practice-based pathway allows professionals to gain experience under supervision while meeting urgent community needs. Social workers are underpaid, underappreciated, and routinely expected to absorb the failures of broken systems. Despite this, we continue to show up for Maryland residents every day. HB0769 represents a realistic, equitable, and necessary step toward aligning licensure with the realities of practice and workforce demand. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB0769.

Sincerely,

Alyssa, LGSW, MSW