

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

My name is Dr. Onoriode “Ono” Ewvaraye, and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Maryland and researcher whose work focuses on stereotype threat and African-American performance under evaluative conditions. I submit this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 769 (HB 769).

My professional work examines stereotype threat, a well-documented psychological phenomenon in which individuals may underperform on assessments when they fear confirming negative stereotypes about their group. Importantly, decades of research, including my own, do not support the conclusion that eliminating uniform assessments is an evidence-based or effective remedy for stereotype threat.

The research instead shows that:

- Stereotype threat is context-dependent, not an inherent flaw in testing.
- The solution lies in continuous improvements in test design, preparation support, and contextual conditions, not abandoning objective measures altogether.
- Removing uniform assessments does not eliminate bias, it replaces transparent standards with subjective, uneven, and less defensible decision-making.

From a scientific and equity perspective, eliminating the licensure exam is not a corrective action; it is a policy overcorrection that introduces new inequities and risks.

Social work education programs and field placements vary widely in rigor, structure, and evaluation standards. Without a uniform licensing exam, there is no consistent way to verify a minimum baseline of competence across applicants.

The licensure exam serves as:

- A public protection safeguard;
- A common, statewide benchmark across diverse educational pathways; and
- A defensible, psychometrically validated measure aligned with professional practice standards.

Weakening licensure standards will have real-world consequences. Insurance reimbursement, wages, and professional recognition are closely tied to the credibility of licensure requirements. Diluting those standards devalues Maryland social work licenses and erodes parity with other behavioral health professions that maintain exam-based licensure.

Maryland's social work licensure system exists to protect the public and uphold the integrity of the profession. As a researcher in stereotype threat, I urge the Committee not to conflate equity concerns with the elimination of standards. HB 769 lowers safeguards without addressing the root causes of disparity and does so at the expense of clients, employers, and the profession itself.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose House Bill 769.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Onoriode "Ono" Ewwaraye, Ph.D., LCSW