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February 18, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall  
House Health Committee  
240 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

***Re: Testifying in Opposition to HB 769 "State Board of Social Work Examiners - Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions"***

Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Jennifer Henkel, and I serve as the Senior Director of Member Engagement and Regulatory Services at the Association of Social Work Boards. I also have the privilege of serving as Project Director for the Licensure Portability grant funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration, which supports the development of the Social Work Licensure Compact.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I wish to begin by acknowledging the overarching objectives of this legislation. I fully support its intent to enhance access to the behavioral health workforce. However, I am here to express concerns related to the proposal that would make the exam requirement optional for entry into practice for bachelor's and master's level licensure in Maryland.

The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), a nonprofit organization, develops and maintains the social work licensing examinations used throughout the United States and Canada. In recent years, ASWB has collaborated with the Council of State Governments, the Department of Defense, and a broad coalition of social work organizations to establish the Social Work Licensure Compact—a bipartisan initiative designed to improve licensure portability for social workers across state lines.

Maryland, alongside thirty other states, has adopted the Social Work Licensure Compact legislation. The Compact enables qualified social workers to obtain multi-state licenses, allowing them to provide services across jurisdictions while upholding essential public protections. Central to the Compact—and all professional licensure compacts—is the universal baseline requirement for competency, which includes successful completion of a nationally recognized examination.

This examination requirement is not arbitrary; it ensures licensure maintains consistent meaning and trustworthiness across states. It assures the public that licensed professionals, regardless of where they were originally certified, have met rigorous and uniform standards.

Should Maryland choose to make the exam requirement optional as a Compact member, the state risks creating a fragmented licensing system. This could result in some social workers being licensed under validated national standards while others are licensed without a competency assessment.

Such a bifurcation presents significant concerns:

- **Public confusion:** Residents deserve transparency regarding what constitutes a licensed social worker. Multiple standards may undermine confidence in the profession and cause uncertainty for those seeking services.
- **Professional disadvantage:** Social workers licensed without exam passage may be ineligible for federal employment opportunities. For instance, the Veterans Health Administration requires exam completion for advancement beyond entry-level roles. Additionally, credentials may become subject to challenge in legal settings when providing expert testimony.
- **Administrative burden:** Managing dual licensing pathways increases complexity and strains limited resources, potentially impeding overall efficiency of licensing processes.

The Compact represents a vital chance to reduce barriers to care, mitigate workforce shortages, and ensure consistent access to qualified professionals—all while safeguarding public safety and trust. I urge the committee to carefully consider the long-term impacts of removing the exam requirement and its potential implications for Maryland social workers' participation. I welcome ongoing collaboration with this committee and stakeholders to promote a robust, portable social work workforce. Thank you for your attention, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



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