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Chief Executive Officer

Stacey Hardy-Chandler, Ph.D., JD, LCSW, PGDip

17126 Mountain Run Vista Ct.
Culpeper, VA 22701

t / 800.225.6880

f / 540.829.0562

info@aswb.org

aswb.org

February 18th, 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 Dr. Stacey Hardy-Chandler, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). ASWB develops and administers the social work licensing examinations and provides resources, services, and technical assistance to social work regulatory boards across the United States and Canada.

ASWB is the only nonprofit organization dedicated exclusively to social work regulation. Founded more than 40 years ago by a coalition of licensing boards, ASWB today represents 64 jurisdictions across the United States and Canada. Our mission is rooted in public protection, supporting safe, competent, and ethical practice across the social work profession. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 769.

While ASWB is sympathetic to and supportive of efforts to recruit and retain qualified social workers, eliminating or weakening the licensing examination requirement would have profound consequences for both public protection and the profession. The social work licensing examinations assess a candidate’s readiness to practice safely and competently. Removing this objective measure of minimum competence places vulnerable client populations at risk and undermines the integrity of the licensure system.

The licensing examination is not an academic exercise or a gatekeeping mechanism detached from practice. It is a post-graduate, practice-based assessment designed to evaluate whether an individual possesses the knowledge, skills, and judgment necessary to practice safely on Day One. It remains the only nationally consistent, objective measure of competence used across jurisdictions.

ASWB has consistently evaluated innovations in testing. For example, ASWB explored modular testing with great care and good faith. Like many in the profession, we were hopeful that modular testing might offer flexibility while preserving rigor. However, the data demonstrated that modular testing would likely result in lower overall pass rates, and higher cumulative

testing costs for candidates, and fewer licensed social workers entering practice.

For those reasons, grounded in psychometric evidence and workforce impact, ASWB did not move forward with modular testing. This experience underscores a critical point: policy decisions must be guided by data, not assumptions, particularly when public protection is at stake.

ASWB's examinations are developed and maintained through rigorous, independent psychometric processes that exceed industry standards and are subject to ongoing review. **Practicing social workers** from diverse backgrounds, including bi- and multilingual professionals, are involved at every stage of exam development to ensure relevance, fairness, and validity. These exams are continuously evaluated to remain aligned with current practice and workforce needs.

In August 2022, ASWB became the first health or human services regulatory organization to publish a comprehensive examination pass-rate analysis with fully disaggregated data. That report identified disparities in examination outcomes across demographic groups, including age and race. However, it is critical not to mistake outcomes for origins. The descriptive data in the report should not be used to draw causal conclusions.

Candidates for licensure across all demographic subgroups do not enter the exam experience with equal access to resources, support, or educational opportunities. To assume otherwise runs counter to decades of evidence demonstrating the systemic inequities that shape educational and professional pathways. The purpose of the report was to illuminate disparities so the profession can engage in informed, equity-focused discussions, not to attribute causation to the examination itself or to justify lowering standards that exist to protect the public.

In recent months, broader efforts to undermine the professional standing of social work have raised significant concerns. Proposals such as House Bill 769 risk reinforcing a harmful narrative that social work does not require rigorous, competency-based preparation. Lowering licensure standards diminishes the professional status social workers have worked decades to achieve and sends the wrong message about the complexity and responsibility inherent in social work practice.

House Bill 769 raises significant concerns regarding interstate licensure mobility and runs directly counter to Maryland's recent legislative direction. In 2024, the General Assembly enacted House Bill 345, that became effective October 1, 2025, affirmatively committing Maryland to nationally aligned licensure standards through participation in the Social Work Licensure Compact, including reliance on a uniform licensure examination as a shared baseline of competence. Maintaining consistency with that decision is essential to preserving regulatory clarity, protecting the integrity of licensure, and honoring the deliberate policy choices the General Assembly made to modernize Maryland's social work licensing system.

The examination is the only component of licensure directly overseen by regulatory boards. Best regulatory practice requires boards to maintain direct oversight of at least one objective component of the licensure decision, rather than relying exclusively on educational credentials or supervision, which can vary widely in quality, content, and rigor. Supervision is essential, but it cannot substitute for an objective assessment of competence.

Addressing workforce shortages is critical, and ASWB strongly supports evidence-based solutions that expand access to education, supervision, financial support, and licensure portability. However, removing

or weakening the examination requirement targets the wrong lever and risks long-term harm to both the profession and the public.

ASWB values its partnership with Maryland policymakers and regulators, and we stand ready to serve as a resource as you consider policies affecting social work licensure. We remain available to provide data, clarify misconceptions, and support informed decision-making grounded in public protection and professional integrity.

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacey D. Hardy-Chandler".

Stacey D. Hardy-Chandler, PhD, JD, LCSW, PGDip
Chief Executive Officer
Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)

ASWB is a nonprofit association whose members comprise the 64 social work licensing authorities from the United States and Canada. ASWB is recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as an entity that provides programs and services to social work regulatory boards in promoting uniformity and lessening burdens on state governments.