

Dear Members of the House Health Committee:

I respectfully **request a favorable report on HB0769.**

I am writing to you as a Spanish-speaking, clinical social worker in Baltimore City who has noticed the impact of the workforce shortage in Maryland. There is a great need for bilingual, bicultural clinicians in this city and throughout the state. Unfortunately, Maryland continues to educate and graduate qualified professionals who are not entering or remaining in the licensed workforce. According to the Maryland Behavioral Health Workforce [Assessment](#), “...70% [of] Masters of Social Work and Clinical and Counseling Psychology graduates from Maryland universities since 2014 were either working in other industries in Maryland, were employed out of state, or not working one year after degree completion” (p. 4). **These data suggest that unnecessary barriers to licensure are limiting the state’s ability to fully utilize its trained workforce.**

HB0769 offers a practical and evidence-based solution. Providing an alternative, non-exam pathway to licensure at the LBSW and LMSW levels has already been implemented successfully in other states and, notably, Washington, DC, through their “[Educational Pathway](#).” In just 72 days, DC reported:

- an 18% increase in LGSW (LMSW-equivalent) licenses,
- an average licensee age of 40,
- 86% of licensees identifying as Black, and
- *58% of licensees residing in Maryland.*

In Maryland, the same rate of increase would equate to more than 1,000 additional social workers entering the workforce.

Importantly, states that have removed or supplemented the Master’s level exam requirement have not experienced increases in disciplinary actions or public protection concerns. This approach maintains standards while removing a costly barrier that has not been shown to predict professional competence or protect the public.

HB0769 reflects a balanced and pragmatic approach. It preserves examination-based licensure while establishing a practice-based alternative that recognizes demonstrated competence, addresses workforce shortages, and expands access to care for Maryland residents without compromising public protection.

Thank you for your consideration of **HB0769** and for your continued commitment to building Maryland's behavioral health workforce. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Lynn Panepinto, LCSW-C