



**Testimony before the House Health Committee
February 25, 2026**

**House Bill 995 - Health Occupations - Behavioral Health Care Providers –
Use of Artificial Intelligence**

SUPPORT

My name is Karessa Proctor, and I am the Executive Director of the Maryland, DC, and Delaware Chapters of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). I represent more than 2,600 social workers in the Maryland Chapter alone.

Our membership reflects the full breadth of the profession. We are fortunate to represent practitioners working at the micro, mezzo, macro, and even international levels of social work. Our members include clinicians providing direct therapy, social workers leading community-based programs, administrators overseeing large systems of care, policy advocates shaping legislation, and scholars advancing research and global practice standards.

I am here today because my own work sits at the intersection of administration, community organizing, and legislation. I am not currently an LCSW-C, which means I cannot practice as a licensed clinical social worker in Maryland. I cannot diagnose or treat clients. That limitation exists to protect the public and to ensure that those providing clinical care meet rigorous education, training, supervision, and ethical standards. If I cannot diagnose and treat clients without that credential, neither should artificial intelligence.

Let me be clear: NASW is not seeking to eliminate artificial intelligence. We recognize that AI has a place in administrative efficiency, research, and even certain supportive tools. However, innovation without guardrails puts both practitioners and the public at risk. This legislation provides necessary guidelines to ensure AI is used responsibly, ethically, and safely within behavioral health contexts.

Social workers handle some of the most sensitive information imaginable: trauma histories, mental health diagnoses, substance use treatment records, immigration status, child welfare involvement, and deeply personal family matters. We must ensure that sensitive client information is not entered into open AI systems where confidentiality, data ownership, and secondary data use cannot be guaranteed. Protecting client privacy is not optional; it is foundational to our profession.

Equally important is the nature of clinical care itself. Effective social work practice is grounded in empathy, nuance, cultural humility, and relational trust. Healing happens within human relationships. While AI can generate language, it cannot genuinely assess risk, interpret nonverbal cues, understand complex trauma responses, or sit with a client in crisis in the way a trained human professional can. Consumers deserve the empathy, discernment, and ethical accountability that only a human being can provide.

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The NASW Code of Ethics guides our position on this issue. Core values such as service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence compel us to support safeguards around emerging technologies. Our ethical standards require us to:

- Protect client confidentiality and privacy.
- Practice within our scope of competence.
- Ensure informed consent, including transparency about how services are delivered.
- Avoid harm and prevent exploitation.
- Advocate for policies that protect vulnerable populations.

Unregulated AI use in clinical contexts risks undermining each of these principles. Without clear standards, consumers may not understand when they are interacting with AI rather than a licensed professional. They may unknowingly disclose protected health information. They may receive advice that lacks appropriate clinical judgment or cultural responsiveness. That is not consistent with our professional mandate.

Left unchecked, we can end up with cases like Zane Shamblyn who was a 23-year-old recent grad who died by suicide after he was repeatedly encouraged by ChatGPT while he spoke about ending his life – right up to his last moments. CNN for that the family later issued a wrongful death lawsuit filed in California state court in San Francisco. The parents say that ChatGPT worsened their son’s isolation by repeatedly encouraging him to ignore his family even as his depression deepened – and then “goaded” him into committing suicide.

HB 0995 represents a thoughtful step toward responsible innovation. It does not ban AI. Rather, it creates guardrails that protect social workers and the communities we serve. It ensures that technology enhances professional practice instead of replacing or undermining it.

We also want to emphasize that we are willing and eager to collaborate. NASW stands ready to work with the bill sponsor and other stakeholders on amendments that strengthen clarity, implementation, and enforceability. Our goal is shared: protecting Marylanders while responsibly integrating emerging technologies into practice.

On behalf of more than 2,600 social workers across Maryland, and thousands more across our regional chapters, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 0995.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting the public.

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