

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

My name is Kristi Love. I am a social worker, and I respectfully request a favorable report on HB0769, along with several amendments that would strengthen the bill's effectiveness and ensure consistent implementation.

I earned my MSW from Howard University over 15 years ago. I took the licensing exam at least five times and missed passing by just a few points each time. Despite strong education and internship experience, my career growth was limited because I did not have the LMSW. That created real professional barriers — and, honestly, a sense of stigma — even though I was fully trained and continue to serve with integrity and competency.

Last year, DC approved an educational pathway to licensure. Because of that change, I finally became licensed. Almost immediately, new job opportunities opened to me, and my salary improved. Pathways work. They strengthen the workforce without lowering standards.

DC is not alone; several other states have adopted similar approaches. And notably, more than half of newly licensed social workers in DC are Maryland residents. That should matter to us. Maryland needs more social workers, now more than ever.

Social workers are not only therapists, and we are not limited to child welfare. We serve in hospitals, schools, senior programs, and community settings — wherever people need support and protection.

I currently work with older adults, helping them maintain social connections, emotional wellness, and independence. I am a long-time Maryland resident and want to serve here fully, but my best opportunities have been in DC because of access to licensure.

HB0769 removes an unnecessary barrier and strengthens Maryland's workforce. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your consideration. Again, I ask for a favorable report.