



Date: March 9, 2026

To: Members of the House Health Occupations Subcommittee

From: SWEAR and Undersigned Members

Re: Opposition to Amended HB769/SB18

Dear Members of the House Health Occupations Subcommittee,

We are writing to you as SWEAR: a grassroots, volunteer-led nonprofit organization founded by Maryland Social Workers, alongside members of our community who have been directly harmed by the current Social Work licensure system. We are here today in firm opposition to the amended version of HB769/SB18.

**SWEAR is the *only* social work organization in Maryland that consistently and specifically advocates for Social Workers from marginalized communities — BIPOC Social Workers, Deaf Social Workers, and those for whom the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exams function as a financial and racial barrier to a career they have already earned.** We have one low-bono lobbyist. We are Social Workers who believe in this work enough to show up session after session, year after year, driven not by pay but by belief in this cause. Despite being the ones to spearhead this entire reform effort, we were not invited to the recent collaborative meeting on February 27th, only being invited later when a member of a legislator's office was unable to attend. It is disappointing to be so frequently sidelined in our own work, traded for more corporate interests when it suits a particular agenda.

We have been showing up since late 2022. We have compromised. We have waited. And we are writing today because we need this committee to understand what three years of compromise has actually looked like and why this bill should not pass in its current form.

### **A Three-Year Record of Good Faith Compromise**

**2023:** SWEAR partnered with Senator Mary Washington to introduce SB871 and SB872. These bills included two things: a temporary moratorium on the ASWB exam and the formation of a Workgroup to examine Maryland's licensure requirements. Facing well-moneyed opposition from National Association of Social Workers - Maryland (NASW-MD), Greater Washington Society of Clinical Social Work (GWSCSW), ASWB, and the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE), we agreed to let the moratorium go entirely. We accepted the Workgroup alone, trusting that the process would be taken seriously and that its recommendations would be honored.

**October 2023 - June 2025:** The Workgroup did its job. After more than a year of monthly meetings, 19 out of 23 members voted to recommend removing the ASWB exam requirement at the LBSW and LMSW licensure levels and creating alternative pathways at the LCSW-C level. The only four members who voted against those recommendations were the representatives from ASWB and the BSWE - the aligned organizations with the most to lose financially from exam reform and the only entities afforded the privilege of two seats each. There were several SWEAR-aligned volunteer Workgroup members, many of whom lost income to be there, while ASWB and BSWE representatives often displayed extremely concerning behavior towards those members.

**2025:** SB379/HB1521 was introduced to codify the Workgroup recommended reform of making the exam optional at the LBSW and LMSW levels. Social Workers showed up to testify. Educators showed up. Employers showed up. **Our side of the room not only outnumbered opposition more than 4 to 1**, but it reflected the communities most harmed by the current system — people who do not normally make it to Annapolis on a Tuesday morning because they are working multiple jobs, managing childcare, or cannot afford unpaid time off. Rather than moving this bill forward, SB379 received a heavy rewrite by the Senate Finance Committee that only included a workgroup extension with new tasks. The tasks listed were either repetitive (questions that had been asked in 2023 and already decided by the Workgroup) or inappropriate for a legislative body to ask a volunteer workgroup to complete for a private organization (monitoring of ASWB's accommodations process).

HB1521 passed the entire House but stalled due to the Chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

We accepted our losses in 2025, too, trusting in the democratic process. And we came back.

### **2026: What HB769/SB18 Was, and What It Has Become**

HB769/SB18 was introduced to create a practice-based alternative pathway to licensure, one grounded in supervised hours and demonstrated competency rather than a standardized exam with well-documented racial and economic disparities. It was modeled after the new Educational Pathway in Washington, DC, which has already seen tremendous success - they are on track to increase their LMSW-equivalent licensees by 26% in just four months. Keeping on par with DC would have allowed Maryland to remain competitive despite typically lower-paying jobs. **This is the pathway the Workgroup envisioned for the LCSW-C, but we brought it forward as a compromise for the LBSW and LMSW.** Once again, advocates supporting this reform vastly outnumbered those opposed, and the vast majority of those opposed have a formal relationship with ASWB.

The amendments introduced by the Senate Finance Committee replaced that pathway with a provisional license that still requires passage of the ASWB exam. **We want to be direct: this is not a compromise. This is not incremental progress. This is the**

**same barrier with a different name.** It will not go into effect until November 2026, which means that, at minimum, there would be only 1-2 months of it until the next legislative session. In 2027, the complacency will become, “We need to see if this works first before we try to pass something better.” We’ve already been told it might be 2-4 years of this model before a more complete reform happens. **This legislature can do better, must do better, and will have the opportunity to do better next year with a new Chair of the Senate Finance Committee.**

Under the amended bill, a Social Worker who cannot pass the ASWB exam remains locked out, regardless of how many supervised hours they have completed, regardless of the competency they have demonstrated, and regardless of the communities they are already serving. The repeat test-taker rate for the Maryland LMSW exam in 2024 was 23.3%, which not only creates a serious problem for Social Workers, but also for employers. Agencies cannot reasonably invest in staff that they may be required to terminate when the provisional period ends. This bill would be bad for social workers, bad for employers, and therefore bad for the clients that need us.

**Throughout all of the compromise of Maryland residents and Social Workers, the entity that remains with its goals untouched is ASWB: a \$51 million “nonprofit,” its wealth earned on the backs of social workers and aspiring social workers.**

### **Maryland Is Falling Behind**

Maryland needs more than 2,600 additional Social Workers in behavioral health settings alone by 2028, according to the state's own 2024 workforce assessment. Maryland's workforce assessment also shows that 70% of Maryland-educated social workers are not staying in Maryland's behavioral health workforce. **The current licensure structure is directly contributing to the exodus, the shortage, and public harm of artificially reducing our workforce. This bill will solve none of these issues.** Maryland Social Workers will continue to flock to jurisdictions that welcome them.

### **Our Ask**

**SWEAR and our undersigned community members urge this Subcommittee to oppose the amended HB769.** As amended, this bill does not reflect the Workgroup's recommendations, address the documented harm of the ASWB exam, nor expand Maryland's Social Work workforce. What it does is protect the status quo and the financial interests of an organization that profits from exam fees *while holding seats on the very boards designed to provide oversight.*

We have compromised **three times** in **three years**. We gave up the moratorium in 2023. We watched a codification bill die in committee in 2025 without a single vote. We have endured harm on a Workgroup that has been invalidated because of the wealthy and well-connected few. And now we are being asked to accept a provisional license that preserves the same exam barrier we have spent three years trying to remove.

**Just like your Subcommittee stood with us last year, we are asking you to stand with us again, but in a different way.** Please oppose the amended HB769 and commit

to a 2027 legislative session that finally addresses the needs of Maryland Social Workers and the Marylanders that need them.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of our perspective.

Respectfully submitted,

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