

**Senate Bill 18 State Board of Social Work Examiners –  
Conditional License to Practice Social Work – Revisions**

Finance Committee

February 10, 2026

**Position: FAVORABLE**

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 18.

SB 18 requires that individuals who have met certain educational requirements be granted a conditional license to practice social work. It also provides alternate pathways to full licensure.

Data from an [alarming 2024 state assessment](#) of Maryland's behavioral health workforce highlights an escalating crisis in access to care. According to the report<sup>1</sup>, which was completed pursuant to legislation the General Assembly passed in 2023 ([SB 283/HB 418](#)), today's workforce of 34,600 behavioral health professionals is 34% smaller than necessary to meet current demand, requiring an immediate influx of 18,200 individuals. An additional 14,600 workers will be required to replace those leaving the field by 2028, requiring a doubling of current capacity in just the next few years to keep pace with need.

The scale of this workforce crisis is particularly striking among Maryland social workers. In 2023, there were an estimated 2,799 social workers employed in behavioral health settings. In order to meet the current demand and replace workers leaving the field, Maryland will need to attract an additional 2,675 social workers by 2028. This will be a tall challenge given recent graduation trends and employment patterns. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, degree completions from Maryland's social work master's programs have declined nine percent from their 2019 peaks. Further, only a small portion of graduates from behavioral health-related and nursing education programs actually work jobs in Maryland providing behavioral health services to residents. Seventy percent of Masters of Social Work and Clinical and Counseling Psychology graduates from Maryland universities since 2014 are either working in other industries in Maryland, are employed out of state, or not working one year after degree completion.

The 2024 assessment outlined six strategies for addressing Maryland's behavioral health workforce crisis, including the promotion of timely and effective licensing:

*“Challenges with the licensing and certification process was identified as a significant issue by both staff and employers in Maryland. This has a direct impact on the availability of services, as there are less licensed clinicians, as well as disincentivizing individuals from entering the profession or attaining licensure.”*

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<sup>1</sup> *Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent*. Maryland Health Care Commission. October 2024.  
[https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md\\_bh\\_workforce\\_rpt\\_SB283.pdf](https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf)

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The General Assembly has taken several important steps in recent years to streamline the delivery of quality behavioral health care and bolster the state's behavioral health workforce, but we are not out of this crisis yet. We must employ every strategy at our disposal to address the unmet need, and improving our licensing practices is one of those strategies.

Senate Bill 18 will help ensure Marylanders can access care when and where needed. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.