

**SB 794 Fav.pdf**

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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
The Maryland State Senate Finance Committee  
The Honorable Pamela Beidle  
3 East Miller Senate Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Senate Bill 794: State Board of Social Work Examiners – Continuing Education Programs – Approval of Authorized Sponsors**

Dear Chaiwoamn Beidle and Members of the Committee,

In order for a Maryland licensed social worker to renew his or her license, the social worker must have completed a required program of 40 continuing education units. This bill deals with the authorized providers of such continuing education.

In the past, there was a process for people to apply to be approved by the *Board of Social Work Examiners* to become a Board Authorized Continuing Education Sponsor. This past process ensured quality control and was affordable for potential sponsors because once vetted, they could then offer workshops without paying an individual fee for every workshop. However, on January 1, 2021, the Board stopped accepting new applications, and thus ended its sponsorship program. In fact, the Board has not approved any authorized sponsors since May 2020.

So, in order to renew his or her license, a social worker must provide evidence that he or she has completed the required continuing education, but the Board is no longer approving persons or organizations to provide the continuing education. Thus, a vacuum currently exists under Maryland law.

While it is possible for local employers to seek approval to provide continuing education from one of only two national organizations, the cost is prohibitive, the approval process is administratively onerous, and the process takes a long time. Further, the approvals last for two years at most, thus requiring the employers to go through the entire process repeatedly at short intervals. I am attaching to my written testimony a sheet detailing the costs and timelines for these approvals. As you can see, they amount to hundreds of dollars.

Senate Bill 794 is a reasonable fix of this problem. It requires the State Board of Social Work Examiners to establish a process to review and approve a person seeking to become an authorized sponsor of continuing education programs for social workers renewing their licenses. This process must include at least one pathway for approval that does not require an applicant to have the approval of a national or regional organization to be approved as an authorized sponsor

and stipulates that the board must create a regulatory framework to ensure oversight of these sponsor certifications.

Senate Bill 794 will save money for employers, will eliminate the need to pay recurring fees to the two national social work organizations, will be time-efficient, will increase the retention of Maryland social workers and most importantly will align with the Board's mandate to protect the public and ensure that Maryland social workers are thoroughly trained.

Let's make it simple and easy for Maryland social workers to obtain their required continuing education credits. The current complicated and expensive system is not in the interests of the citizens of Maryland. This bill will solve the problem.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 794 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

# **NASW Maryland - 2024 SB 794 FAV - Approval of Auth**

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**Senate Finance Committee  
March 12, 2024**

**Senate Bill 794 - State Board of Social Work Examiners –  
Continuing Education Programs – Approval of Authorized Sponsors  
SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on SB 794, which requires the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) resume responsibility for approving authorized sponsors of continuing education programs for social workers in our state. I am a licensed school social worker who has practiced in Maryland for 33 years and I, along with NASW-Maryland’s Social Workers in Schools Committee, are strongly in favor of SB 794.

The BSWE’s primary responsibility is to protect the public. As our BSWE has the responsibility to license social workers, the BSWE should also maintain responsibility for assessing and authorizing providers of continuing education to ensure that those providers are qualified and providing content that is relevant to social workers in Maryland.

In Maryland, master’s level social workers are required to accrue 40 continuing education units (CEUs) every two years to maintain their license as required by COMAR 10.42.06. There are two types of CEUs: Category I and Category II. Of the required 40 CEUs, a minimum of 20 must be Category I. There is almost always a cost associated with Category I continuing education.

In June 2019, I contacted the BSWE to apply on behalf of my current school social work department to become a provider of continuing education as we, at that time, were a brand new school social work department. I was completely surprised to see the link to apply to become a provider of continuing education gone, and no information on how to apply anywhere on the BSWE website. I called and spoke to a staff member who told me that they no longer would be approving continuing education providers.

On June 9, 2023, I, along with school social workers from several school districts, attended the BSWE Board meeting to request that they resume providing approval to become continuing education providers, to reduce the hardship in obtaining continuing education through the employer. Having the BSWE resume this responsibility is crucial to address the work force shortages in our profession as we face the rising mental health needs in our communities.

The BSWE’s abdication of its responsibility to approve sponsors of Category I CEU activities created a huge vacuum. It left employers only two options: to apply through one of two national organizations, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) or the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Both the national ASWB and NASW approval processes are administratively onerous, time intensive, and costly (see Attachment #1). Additionally, their approval lasts for one year (NASW) or two years (ASWB), requiring potential providers to pay for, and go through the time-intensive approval process repeatedly.

**My school system eventually obtained approval through the ASWB to provide one, three hour training, but that process took 11 months. The time and expense involved was a burden to our department. The delay in the approval process hindered our social workers' ability obtain their continuing education in a timely way.**

The funds spent to obtain this approval should not leave our state, or be paid for by Maryland taxpayers who fund social work salaries in our government agencies, including our schools. Senate Bill 794 would be a more timely, practical, less expensive way for employers to provide Category I CEUs. The benefits of enacting SB 794 include:

- It saves money for employers, including many that are government agencies. The cost of one Category I CEU ranges from \$20-\$75.
- It saves our state government and nonprofit agencies additional money by not paying recurring fees to ASWB or NASW (up to \$1,425 per year or every other year). When the BSWE used to approve Category I providers, there was a nominal one-time fee of to become a permanent approved sponsor. There are only four school systems in Maryland that are approved as authorized sponsors of continuing education programs (see Attachment #2).
- Earning Category I CEUs at work sites is time-efficient, provides targeted topics for the employees, and provides a significant incentive for hiring and maintaining social workers.
- Organizations and individuals (including for-profit organizations) that were approved prior to May, 2019 are permitted to provide Category I CEUs, while those who did not apply prior to May, 2019, are not. SB 794 addresses this inequity.
- In the face of work force shortages for social workers, and increasing mental health needs across our state, passing SB 794 increases retention of social workers by enabling Category I CEUs to become part of their employment contract.
- Since the BSWE enforces the continuing education requirements in COMAR, including required and approved topics for continuing education, the BSWE is also best suited to approve sponsors.
- SB 794 aligns with the BSWE's mandate to protect the public and ensure licensed social workers are thoroughly trained and able to serve the public with a high level of expertise.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and support of SB 794 as we work to ensure the highest quality social work practice for the people of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Flanagan LCSW-C  
NASW-MD, Social Workers in Schools Committee

## Attachment #1

Below is a chart comparing the costs associated with applying to become a continuing education provider with either national organization:

	<b>Association of Social Work Boards</b>	<b>National Association of Social Workers</b>
Initial fee:	\$25	\$125
Approval good for:	2 years	1 year
Approval cost:	Individual course: \$125	Workshop: \$200
	Provider approval: \$500 - \$1,400	Conference: \$325
		Symposium: \$1,250
Late fee for initial approval:		\$300 (if not received within 30 days of event)
Late fee for renewal:	\$100 (if not received within 10 days of approval expiration date)	
Cost for use of seal:		One time use: \$100
		Annual use: \$300
Renewal cost:	\$600-\$1500, depending on number or courses	same as original cost
Review fee:	\$50, after 3 renewals	
Reinstatement fee:	\$600 (plus \$100 late fee if requested after approval expiration date)	
Appeal fee:	\$900	
Timelines for approval:	6 weeks for pre-application approval; then 3 months (or longer) for course approval	Not noted, but must submit application 30 days minimum before event

Retrieved 2/18/2024 from:

<https://www.aswb.org/licenses/ace-approved-continuing-education/ace-approval-types/>

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Careers/CE-Approval-Program/Apply>

## Attachment #2

Here is the list of County School Systems that do and do not have approval to provide Category I continuing education units.

Approved Providers	Not
Anne Arundel County Public School System	Allegany County Public School System
Baltimore County Public School System	Baltimore City Public School System
Frederick County Public School System	Calvert County Public School System
Montgomery County Public School System	Caroline County Public School System
Washington County Public School System	Carroll County Public School System
	Cecil County Public School System
	Charles County Public School System
	Dorchester County Public School System
	Garrett County Public School System
	Harford County Public School System
	Howard County Public School System
	Kent County Public School System
	Prince George’s County Public School System
	Queen Anne’s County Public School System
	St. Mary’s County Public School System
	Somerset County Public School System
	Talbot County Public School System
	Wicomico County Public School System
	Worcester County Public School System

Retrieved 2/18/2024 from: <https://health.maryland.gov/bswe/Pages/ApprovedSponsor.aspx> ,



**SB0794 Howard Co BOE Testimony 031224 for FIN - So**

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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,  
Finance Committee  
March 12, 2024**

**SB0794: FAVORABLE**

**State Board of Social Work Examiners – Continuing Education Programs – Approval of Authorized Sponsors**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0794 State Board of Social Work Examiners – Continuing Education Programs – Approval of Authorized Sponsors** as a cost saving measure to support and retain school system social workers.

SB0794 requires the Maryland State Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) to establish a process to review and approve a person seeking to become an authorized sponsor of continuing education programs for social workers renewing a license under § 19–308 of the Health Article. The process must include at least one pathway for approval that does not require an applicant to have the approval of a national or regional organization to be approved by the BSWE as an authorized sponsor.

Currently in Maryland, master’s level social workers, including those working for local school systems, are required to accrue 40 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) every two years to maintain their license. CEUs must include a combination of Category I activities and Category II activities. SB0794 addresses Category I CEUs.

Category I activities are live, real-time, interactive events provided by BSWE-approved sponsors. Of the required 40 CEUs, a minimum of 20 must be Category I. Category II activities (which can be no more than 20 CEUs) do not require BSWE approval. Activities such as journal clubs, in-service trainings, and home study courses may be used to satisfy Category II CEUs.

Before May 2019, the BSWE granted approval to organizations, such as local school systems, that met certain criteria. The cost to become a Category I approved sponsor was \$200. This was a one-time fee and once organizations were approved, the approval was permanent. In May 2019, the BSWE stopped approving sponsors of Category I CEUs, and instead delegated this responsibility to the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The ASWB and NASW processes are difficult, administratively burdensome, time-intensive, and costly (approximately \$1,500) for school systems to become board-approved providers. Additionally, approval by NASW and ASWB lasts for only 1 year (NASW) or 2 years (ASWB), at which time school systems and other organizations are required to pay for and go through the approval process again. SB0794 would require BSWE to approve qualifying applications once again.

The Board supports SB0794 because it would be a more timely, practical, and less expensive way for the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), and other organizations, to become BSWE-approved sponsors. It can save HCPSS and staff money as the school system is not covering the cost of leave that may result from social workers taking time off to earn Category I CEUs outside of HCPSS, as well as the elimination of recurring ASWB or NASW fees. It also increases retention and enables HCPSS Social Workers to enhance their professional growth by sharing their expertise, while earning required CEUs “in-house.”

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0794 from this Committee.