

TO: The Honorable Joselyn Pena-Melnyk, Chair Members, House
Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Ken Kerr

FROM: Starling Butler Hathcock, LCSW-C

DATE: February 1, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 34 - Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Dear Chairperson Pena-Melnyk and Distinguished Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

I sincerely thank you for considering my oral testimony supporting House Bill 34 on the "Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact". I am Starling Hathcock, a Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C) residing and practicing in Frederick County, Maryland.

Today, I invite you to peer into the lives of individuals whose paths have intertwined with mine throughout my career.

Enter Maria, a resilient low-income mother raising two children in rural West Virginia. Maria has navigated the depths of PTSD for years, grappling with its weight without the anchor of consistent mental health care. In her corner of the world, mental health resources are scant, with a sparse scattering of therapists trained in evidence-based trauma treatment.

Regrettably, the absence of an interstate social work licensure compact becomes a challenging barrier. Despite the potential for telehealth services, I cannot support Maria due to bureaucratic limitations.

This scenario illustrates how the absence of an interstate compact disproportionately affects vulnerable populations like Maria. These individuals often face barriers to accessing mental health care in their immediate communities, and the inability to seek care across state lines only deepens their challenges. Implementing the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact in Maryland would be a vital step toward breaking down these barriers and ensuring that individuals like Maria can access the care they need, regardless of location.

Let me introduce Sarah, an 18-year-old high school graduate from Maryland. She's filled with both excitement and apprehension as she prepares to embark on her college journey in a distant state, far removed from the comforting embrace of her family and friends.

As Sarah immerses herself in college life, she encounters the pressures of academic rigor, forging new relationships, and navigating unfamiliar surroundings. Unfortunately, the stress triggers a resurgence of symptoms.

Sarah reaches out to me for assistance. Regrettably, she discovered that I could not extend telehealth services to her across state lines due to the absence of an interstate compact.

Sarah's plight underscores the urgent necessity for the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact in Maryland. With this legislation firmly established, Sarah could seamlessly continue her therapy sessions with her trusted therapist via telehealth, ensuring a smoother transition into college life and fostering improved mental health outcomes during this pivotal juncture in her life.

As a dedicated social worker based in Maryland, my focus lies in trauma therapy, employing evidence-based methods like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) to aid survivors on their healing journeys. The pressing need for my expertise extends beyond Maryland's borders, reaching neighboring states such as West Virginia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, where trauma survivors struggle to access sufficient care.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to improve access to mental health care by enacting the Social Work Interstate Compact. By breaking down barriers for vulnerable populations, reducing financial burdens on social workers, and leveraging telehealth, we can address the mental health crisis plaguing our nation while boosting Maryland's economy. Let's take decisive action and make Maryland a trailblazer in mental health care reform.

I passionately urge you to lend your support to the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, recognizing its potential to make a transformative impact on mental health service accessibility and continuity of care.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Starling".

Starling Hathcock
Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C)
Frederick County, Maryland