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Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners
4201 Patterson Ave., 3rd Floor
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**2024 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL NO: HB 34
COMMITTEE: HGO
POSITION: SUPPORT

TITLE: Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

BILL ANALYSIS: This bill allows the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners (the “Board”) to join an interstate license compact.

POSITION AND RATIONALE: The Board supports HB 34.

An interstate social work compact will eliminate barriers to practice and increase access to care (especially in areas that are underserved, geographically isolated or lack specialty care) by increasing the efficiency of becoming licensed across state borders. Currently, social workers must seek a separate license in each state in which they want to practice, which can be costly, as well as labor and time intensive. A compact creates a more efficient processing system, while protecting public safety. Nine professions currently have interstate compacts for regulating occupational licensing: Physicians, Nurses, EMS Officials, Physical Therapists, Psychologists, Audiology and Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Counselors.

Seven states, including Maryland, must enact this social work compact before a social work commission is developed to determine the rules. The Board would maintain control over the State practice act and licensure processes while having access to a centralized database of disciplinary action records to provide rapid access to information. It would not only reduce processing time, but it would enhance public safety.

Social workers practice in nearly all community settings, including schools, hospitals, behavioral health clinics, senior centers, prisons, child welfare and juvenile services, the military, corporations, courts, private practice, elected office and in numerous public and private agencies. Social workers provide urgently needed mental health and behavioral health services and help clients who face a disability or a life-threatening disease or a social problem, such as homelessness or unemployment. Social workers serve on crisis response teams and assist victims of violence. They also assist families that have serious domestic conflicts, involving child, family or other spousal abuse and neglect. Social workers conduct research, advocate for improved

services, and engage in systems design, manage nonprofits, or are involved in planning or policy development. Social workers provide these critically needed services every day.

The demand for social workers is expected to increase in coming years. Specifically, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that the employment of social workers will increase by twelve percent over the next decade. This expected increase is fifty percent more than the average expected for all occupations. There is expected to be a particularly significant need for child, family, and school social workers, healthcare social workers, and mental health and substance abuse social workers. There continues to be difficulty accessing social workers and other mental health and behavioral health providers in rural areas, especially specialists. Despite the invaluable contributions and services that social workers provide, the profession faces a recruitment and retention problem that is exacerbated by low starting salaries, high student loan debt and demanding day-to-day work loads, which can lead to burn out and social workers opting to leave the profession. For example, child welfare agencies across the country have 20-50 % turnover rates for qualified social worker positions.

The compact provides a tool for addressing these workforce shortages and will strengthen Maryland's access to highly qualified social workers. It eases mobility for licensees and expands employment opportunities into new markets. It will also support relocating military spouses and families.

Thank you for considering this testimony. The Board of Social Work Examiners is respectfully requesting a favorable report on HB 34. If you require additional information please contact Susan Coppage, Board Chair of the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners at (410) 490-9933 or susan.coppage@maryland.gov.

The opinion of the Board expressed in this document does not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.