

January 24, 2024

Written Testimony in Favor of HB 34 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Thank you Delegate Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Cullison, and all the members of Health and Government Operations Committee for addressing this critical workforce issue and therefore recognizing the vital role of social work. The University of Maryland, School of Social Work appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of HB 34, which would allow Maryland's social workers to be part of an Interstate Compact and would extend this option for social workers that other health professionals currently hold in Maryland.

If HB 34 passes, Maryland could join the *Social Work Licensure Interstate Compact* and social workers would be eligible to apply for inclusion into a compact with other participating states. Currently, social workers must seek a separate license in each state/territory in which they wish to practice. An interstate compact is an important strategy for workforce development enabling social workers to practice in other compact member states without the need for multiple licenses.

Other advantages to participating in an interstate compact include: elimination of barriers to practice and increased access to care (especially in areas that are underserved, geographically isolated or lack specialty care); improved continuity of care when clients travel or relocate; support for spouses of relocating active duty military personnel; elimination of the necessity for licenses in multiple states; employment opportunities for interstate practice for social workers; and enhanced interstate teletherapy. Participation in an interstate compact is especially critical to enhance teletherapy social work services. Currently, teletherapy may only be provided by a licensed Maryland social worker if the client is located in Maryland when the services are provided.

HB 34 would not restrict Maryland in any way to make changes for licensure in Maryland but would expand the employment opportunities for social workers who reside in Maryland. If in the future, if Maryland were to eliminate the national test requirement from the licensing process, a Maryland Social Worker would still have the option to join the interstate compact by meeting the requirements of the interstate compact, if different from their state requirements.

HB 34 also strengthens the profession of social work because other health professionals currently participate in their own interstate compacts and social workers do not have these career options. For example, in the 2021 legislative session, HB 736 *Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact*, passed allowing Maryland's licensed professional counselors access to their interstate compact and HB 34 would extend this same professional privilege for social workers and increase access to social work services.

Respectfully submitted by
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cc: Delegate Kenneth Kerr, sponsor of HB 34