

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

FROM: Sara Rodriguez, 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:

Thank you for considering my written statement supporting House Bill 34 on the " Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact" for inclusion in the public hearing record. I am Sara Rodriguez, a Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C) residing and practicing in Montgomery County, Maryland.

The gap between the demand for quality mental health services and the available providers to care for clients in need. The rigorous education and training received by mental health professionals, irrespective of state, coupled with mandatory continued education post-licensure, underscore the dedication to maintaining high standards in our field.

Practicing across state lines is crucial in addressing disparities in access to culturally competent mental and behavioral health services, alleviating inequities related to socioeconomic status, (dis)ability status, gender diversity, sexuality, and other barriers that impede individuals from receiving adequate care.

Clearing barriers holds particular importance in advocating for marginalized communities, ensuring they receive treatment and support, especially when in-person appointments may be challenging or finding a suitable clinician becomes a hurdle, such as during a pandemic. For my practice in particular, this affects foster and adoptive family's ability to access our specialized training in this area and access to providers who offer insurance coverage, as our practice does. This ruling would also allow college students to have continuity of care while they travel to and from their institutions.

Drawing inspiration from existing licensure compacts for various healthcare professions, including nurses, physical therapists, physicians, psychologists, and counselors, the Social Work Compact enhances licensure portability for practitioners. Simultaneously, it empowers state regulatory boards to better protect consumers by facilitating the seamless sharing of licensure information.

The Social Work Compact brings numerous benefits, impacting those needing critical mental health support and social workers. It achieves this by:

1. Facilitating mobility for social workers meeting uniform licensure requirements.
2. Expanding access to care for clients.

3. Ensuring continuity of care for clients and social workers during relocations or travel across state lines.
4. Simplifying the maintenance of certifications for military personnel and their spouses during relocations.
5. Safeguarding and strengthening the existing system of state licensure.

Notably, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact preserves each state's authority to regulate the profession. It does not alter the scope of practice or affect state practice laws. Social workers operating under the Compact must adhere to the laws and rules of the state where they practice, including compliance with the state's scope of practice.

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,

Sara Rodriguez
Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C)
Montgomery County, MD