



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 18, 2021

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 736- Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 736.

Just 39,080 of the estimated 436,278 people in Maryland who need substance use disorders (SUD) treatment receive it—roughly 9%.¹ Maryland hospitals support measures to strengthen our health care workforce. Yet, the state faces an ongoing shortage of behavioral health professionals qualified to treat people with SUD.

Streamlining the process to license professional counselors in multiple states—through the interstate compact allowed in HB 736—would improve access to care, particularly for specialized services.

Lack of licensure portability is one of the most critical issues impacting counselors and clients and harms access to mental health services for Marylanders in underserved areas. It also fails to address the mobile nature of health care providers, forces patients to seek new counselors when they move, and prohibits counselors from continuing their work with patients who move to a new jurisdiction. Most states require counselors to be licensed in the state where the patient resides, which limits tele-behavioral health options. It is difficult for counselors to transfer their licenses from one state or jurisdiction to another due to independent jurisdictional licensing rules and regulations. Interstate compacts, established by HB 736, address these issues.

Compacts offer a pathway for counselors to move seamlessly from one state to another. Compacts work on rules and regulations agreed to by participating states to allow health occupation boards to maintain their authority over licensed professionals. This committee passed similar legislation to ensure nurses and doctors have comparable compacts, which successfully improved access to needed services. We urge the committee's *favorable report* on this bill to ensure access to robust behavioral health services for Marylanders suffering from mental health and substance use disorder conditions.

For more information, please contact:
Jennifer Witten, Vice President, Government Affairs
Jwitten@mhaonline.org

¹ The Maryland Addictions Directors Council. (n.d.). "[By the Numbers: Workforce Shortage](#)".