

TO: The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair
Members, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Joanne C. Benson

FROM: Kathleen Hawkins, LMSW

DATE: February 13, 2024

RE: SUPPORT – Senate Bill 204 - Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Dear Chairperson Beidle and Distinguished Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I sincerely thank you for considering my written statement supporting Senate Bill 204 on the “Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact”, for inclusion in the public hearing record. I am Kathleen Hawkins, a Licensed Master Social Worker residing in Annapolis and practicing in Montgomery County, Maryland.

The significance of the Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact resonates deeply with me due to the substantial gap between the demand for mental health services and the limited number of licensed providers available to deliver ethical and safe care. 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.

The ability to practice across state lines is pivotal in addressing disparities in access to culturally competent mental and behavioral health services. Doing so can alleviate 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.

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.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Hawkins, LMSW