



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

Statement of CAPT Lynn Nash
SB 204 – Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact
February 13, 2024

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I am here to testify on behalf of this bill, as well as answer any questions that you might have. For the record, my name is CAPT (R) Lynn Nash. I am a nurse and as a healthcare professional, I understand the challenges of moving my professional license every time I had a change of station move. I started my uniformed services career as a military spouse and then went on to serve for over 30 years on active duty in both the U.S. Army and Public Health Service.

SB 204 is a common-sense approach to improving license portability and employment, especially for our service families. The Social Work Licensure Compact itself is sponsored and funded by the Department of Defense, along with the Council of State Governments and the Future of the Association of Social Work Boards.

Here are some statistics that support why this bill is necessary—all are referenced in my written testimony:

- The average military family **moves every 2-3 years**. For military spouses, these frequent relocations mean major disruptions in their careers.
- Fifty percent (**50%**) of **active-duty spouses work in fields that require an occupational license** and each state and territory have their own process—that's 55 different sets of rules.
- Every time a service family moves, the spouse often spends thousands of hours (and \$\$\$) to continue their career, often going through a burdensome process to re-license.
- The **average time to look and find a job is 19 weeks** OR **\$12,374 per year in lost wages** trying to relicense and/or find work in the new state.
- The unemployment rate for **military spouses is 22%** - a figure that hasn't changed since 2015. **This is 3 to 6 times greater than the national average**, even though they often have more experience and education.
- That is why the Department of Defense sees licensure as a **MAJOR issue** that negatively influences reenlistment decisions and the military's ability to recruit and retain service

SB 204 - Social Work Licensure Compact – **Favorable**

Members; and why **Department of Defense has supported similar legislation for over 16 years** because they see the portability of licensure as a *readiness* issue.

The purpose of this compact is to facilitate the interstate practice and regulation of social workers to **improve public access to competent Social Work Services**, by reducing overly burdensome and duplicative requirements associated with holding multiple licenses. The Compact preserves the regulatory authority of States to protect public health and safety through the current system of State licensure, and it lowers expenses and gets the applicant back to work sooner – a real benefit to our service families. The cost to implement this bill is minimal.

This bill is **DIFFERENT from the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022** (HR7939), which the President signed into federal law on January 5, 2023. Section 705A of the Act, “Portability of Professional Licenses of Servicemembers and Their Spouses” addresses “**covered licenses**” which provides a mechanism and “states covered license shall be considered valid at a similar scope of practice and in the discipline applied for in the jurisdiction of such new residency for the duration of such military orders”. The law:

- Amends Title VII of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 4021 et seq.)
- Applies licensing reciprocity between states to all professions except the practice of law

Here in Maryland, a service spouse applying under the Act is issued a letter of endorsement, not an actual Maryland license. The Maryland Department of Labor’s webpage which states “**Please be advised that this is NOT an application for permanent licensure or certification in the State of Maryland. Rather, this is an application for an official letter of recognition that will allow you to practice**”. Many inspection organizations, such as the Joint Committee on the Accreditation of Hospitals, do not regard an endorsement as meeting the requirements for an in-state or compact license, creating issues for the spouse and employer. Holding a multi-state compact license avoids this complication.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a non-partisan organization of 21 Veteran organizations representing over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families -- almost half of the 355,000 veterans in the State. The Coalition **strongly supports SB 204– Social Work Licensure Compact and asks for a favorable report.**

Thank you