

TO: Maryland General Assembly, Senate Finance Committee
Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Senator Katherine Klausmeier, Vice Chair
CC: Senator Joanne Benson, Bill Sponsor
FROM: Jennifer E. Klingler, LCSW-C
DATE: February 12, 2024

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

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

Thank you for considering this written testimony in SUPPORT of SB 204, The Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.

I have worked in the field of mental health since 1997, graduated with a Master of Social Work degree in 2001 and obtained advanced state licensure in 2003. I have worked in numerous settings including crisis response, outpatient treatment, inpatient hospital treatment, psychiatric research and now own an independent private practice.

Social workers are a key component of our country's mental health system, which is woefully lacking providers. I trust that the committee members are aware of the many ramifications of the consequences of inadequate access to treatment. The need for more access to professional licensed mental health care providers has never been greater.

The Interstate Compact increases the number of available clinicians, often concentrated in more populated areas, to areas with greater need and fewer clinicians. It would also allow providers to be able to offer their expert care to clients in participating states, where specialized services may not be as accessible.

I have a specialty in helping families affected by serious and persistent mental illness' such as Schizophrenia and Bipolar disorder. With early care and intervention, patient outcomes are improved, there are fewer strains on our hospital and legal systems, and reduced rates of disability. Families often contact me from other states asking for Family Therapy to help them and their loved one manage these conditions. These services can effectively be provided via telehealth. Location/distance are no longer barriers to obtaining expert care. However, without the Interstate Compact, I can not provide them with any direct service. And so, families are they are often left with their underfunded and understaffed community mental health centers, few of which are able to provide extensive family therapy with experienced clinicians.

It is true that Social Work testing/licensing process has it's problems, rooted in systemic racism. These are being addressed by the Association of Social Work Boards which must act to change the exams to eliminate racial bias. It is also true that Social Workers and our services should be treated as other health care providers, many of whom are permitted to practice in other states via similar compacts. Social Workers are highly educated, licensed health care providers who

undergo continued education and are held to high standards. We are critical part of our country's mental health system. Not supporting this bill does not correct the problems with the licensure exams. Not supporting this Interstate compact ONLY has the effect of reducing people's access to needed care.

Thank you, Senator Benson, for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I am grateful for the committee's consideration of my testimony in support of SB 204 and urge you to vote in favor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer Elledge LCSW-C". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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