



DATE: February 13, 2024 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance
BILL NO: Senate Bill 204
BILL TITLE: Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 204 - Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 204 enters Maryland into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. This act is contingent on the enacting of substantially similar legislation in six other states. Currently one state has enacted the compact, Missouri, with pending legislation in 22 other state legislatures.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive, and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based, and community-based programs. Over 27,000 individuals receive services annually at Kennedy Krieger. We employ more than 2,600 persons who play a vital role in our mission to transform the lives of children with disorders of the brain.

At Kennedy Krieger, clinical social workers are part of an interdisciplinary teams of professionals. Through their work, they enable individuals and their families to utilize their natural strengths to manage the ongoing realities and stresses of disability and other mental health or medical conditions that affect individual, family and community functioning and relationships. The social work department provides the following clinical services, as determined by individual and family needs, through any one of the department's inpatient or outpatient programs at Kennedy Krieger.

- Clinical evaluation of individual and family functioning
- Development of an individualized treatment plan
- Individual, family, and group therapy and counseling
- Parent training
- Educational, support and stress management groups
- Case management

Rationale:

Social workers are an essential part of the care team. But, due to ongoing shortages, there is a lack of available individuals to serve in these positions. Before the pandemic, there was a global shortage in the healthcare workforce¹. Predictions forecast that employment demands in healthcare will grow faster this decade compared to all other occupations. This includes an increased need for social workers, with demand expected to increase 13% through 2029.²

Social Work Telehealth Services: Kennedy Krieger provided approximately 30,000 appointments last year to over 3000 patients, of whom over 200 live outside of the state of Maryland.

While over ninety percent of the patients seen by social workers reside across Maryland, the use of telehealth during the pandemic has been beneficial for our Maryland families residing in Southern Maryland, Western Maryland, and the Eastern Shore and those out of state. Using Telehealth in state as an alternative service delivery model has reduced costs for families related to lost time from work, gas/mileage costs, and other travel-associated expenses, and has allowed patients to receive service in their natural setting. Results of our initial Institute-wide patient experience survey to all families who received telehealth services from March 15, 2020, through end of May 2020 indicate that the majority of patients & families are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the telehealth services, and many indicate a desire to continue receiving telehealth even once in-person services are available again in their specific programs.

¹ Figueroa CA, Harrison R, Chauhan A, Meyer L. Priorities and challenges for health leadership and workforce management globally: a rapid review. *BMC Health Services Research*. 2019;19(1)doi:10.1186/s12913-019-4080-7

² Source: www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm#tab-1

Out of State Services:

Kennedy Krieger Institute provides specialized services to patients nationally and internationally. In pre-pandemic times, families would need to make arrangements to complete the potentially costly and time-consuming trip to Kennedy Krieger Institute to obtain the skilled services their child and/or family required. The Telehealth service delivery model enabled our social workers to see patients from 14 states and the District of Columbia, but barriers with licensure and regulations can cause significant delays and sometimes an inability to provide the specialized care. With the complete services offered both at Kennedy Krieger Institute locations, in our community, and in the homes of our patients and their families combined with our geographic proximity to numerous surrounding states, there has been and will continue to be extreme struggles in providing care in the absence of an interstate compact.

Maryland's participation in the Social Work Licensure Compact would serve to:

- increase client/patient access to care,
- facilitate continuity of care when client/patient relocates,
- certify that psychologists licensed in other Social Work Licensure Compact states and treating Maryland patients have met acceptable standards of practice across education, training and experience,
- promote cooperation between Compact states in areas of licensure and regulation,
- offer a higher degree of consumer protection across state lines, and
- permit social workers to provide services to populations currently underserved or geographically isolated.

Enacting the Social Work Licensure Compact will allow a formal and legal relationship amongst states that promote a common agenda, to improve the health and wellbeing of the patients and families that we serve so they can live their lives to the fullest. This will allow families across participating states to have access to the highest quality of social workers available while also decreasing the burdens placed on the patient, family, and the system. Though the need for an interstate compact has existed for many years, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed this need to the forefront. As states have removed or modified their telehealth waivers, as well as the policies for expedited licensure that were put into place due to the pandemic, access to care and continuity of care has been reduced, negatively impacting the full potential of those who need specialized services. To date, there are 22 states including our sister states of Pennsylvania and Virginia that have approved the Social Work Compact or have pending legislation. It is time for Maryland to join the Social Work Compact to ensure access to mental health for all Maryland residents, and to ensure that Maryland social workers can provide telebehavioral health services to all their patients, including those in states participating in the Compact.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 204.