

To: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Maria F. Smith, LCSW-C

Re: HB0034 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Position: Favorable with Amendments

February 12, 2024

Good Afternoon Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Maria F. Smith (she/her). I am a Maryland resident currently living in Rockville, Maryland (District 18) and who was born & raised in College Park (District 21). I have been a licensed social worker in the State of Maryland since 2016. I have worked as a direct social service provider and mental health therapist. At times, I have also been licensed in Washington, DC, though the cost of renewing my license in both Maryland and DC every other year has made it hard to sustain licensure in both places.

In theory, I support SB0204, cross-filed as SB0034. The Interstate Social Work Compact appears to make it easier for social workers to work across state lines. As a telehealth therapist, this could benefit me by opening up my list of potential clients seeking services within my niche. This would, of course, lead to me expanding my services into other states, and potentially reduce the amount of Maryland residents that I serve.

My main concern with SB0204 as written, is that it continues to uphold our profession's biased national exams. By including this exam requisite, the Compact leaves out **all** social workers who have *not* been able to pass biased licensing exams, a group that disproportionately includes social workers who are older, Black and brown, deaf and hard of hearing, and English as a second language speakers. In turn, this also impacts services provided to the many communities they represent & serve.

Before looking to expand the reach of licensed social workers in Maryland or filling workforce shortages through bringing in more social workers from other states, might we first find better ways to support Maryland social workers who are already here in our local communities?

I support **SB0204 with Amendments**. I ask that you seek council and consideration from members of the **Workgroup on Social Worker Requirements for Licensure** before passing this legislation.

Sincerely,

Maria F. Smith, MSW, LCSW-C
Rockville, Maryland
District 18