

Senate Bill 204 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Finance Committee

February 13, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 204.

SB 204 enters Maryland into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact whereby Maryland social workers can deliver care in other compact states, and vice versa. The state has already adopted compacts for professional counselors and psychologists.

Maryland is in the midst of a behavioral health workforce crisis. Federal data¹ released just last month found that Maryland has 64 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs)², including 14 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20% of residents are getting their mental health needs met, impact over 1.8 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that 16 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers, with a number that are considerably lower.³ And in a 2021 issue brief⁴, the Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland found staff vacancies in 78% of child outpatient mental health centers, 83% of psychiatric rehabilitation programs for minors, and 50% of youth targeted case management programs. This is unsustainable. There are simply not enough behavioral health professionals to meet the mental health and substance use needs of all Marylanders.

The General Assembly has taken several important steps in recent years to streamline the delivery of quality behavioral health care and bolster the state's behavioral health workforce, but we are not out of this crisis yet. We must employ every strategy at our disposal to address the unmet need, and interstate licensure compacts are one of those strategies. They increase access to care by adding depth to local labor pools.

SB 204 will help ensure Marylanders can access mental health and substance use care when and where needed. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport>

² A HPSA is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in one of three categories – primary care, dental health, and mental health

³ <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/maryland?year=2022&measure=Mental+Health+Providers&tab=1>

⁴ <http://mdcbh.org/files/manual/169/Child%20Utilization%20-%20Sept%202021.pdf>

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