

TO: The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair
Members, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Joanne C. Benson

FROM: Charity Mitchell

DATE: February 13, 2024

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

Dear Madam Chair Beidle and Distinguished Members of the Finance Committee:

I extend my sincere gratitude for considering my endorsement of Senate Bill 204, which advocates for the implementation of the "Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact," to be included in the public hearing record. My name is Charity Mitchell, and I am a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) practicing in Frederick County, Maryland.

The significance of the Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact resonates deeply with me due to the substantial gap between the demand for mental health services and the limited number of licensed providers available. The extensive education and training that mental health professionals undergo, irrespective of state, coupled with mandatory post-licensure education, underscore our unwavering dedication to upholding high standards in the field.

The ability to practice across state lines is paramount in addressing disparities in access to culturally competent mental and behavioral health services. This approach can mitigate inequalities related to socioeconomic status, (dis)ability status, gender diversity, sexuality, and other barriers hindering individuals from accessing adequate care. Eliminating such barriers is especially critical for marginalized communities, ensuring they receive the treatment and support they need, particularly during challenging periods like a pandemic.

Drawing inspiration from existing licensure compacts for healthcare professions, the Social Work Compact enhances licensure portability and empowers state regulatory boards to safeguard consumers by facilitating the seamless exchange of licensure information.

The Social Work Compact offers numerous benefits, impacting both those in need of critical mental health support and social workers, including:

- Facilitating mobility for social workers meeting uniform licensure requirements.
- Expanding access to care for clients.
- Ensuring continuity of care for clients and social workers during relocations or travel across state lines.

- Simplifying the maintenance of certifications for military personnel and their spouses during relocations.
- Safeguarding and reinforcing the existing system of state licensure.

Critically, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact upholds each state's authority to regulate the profession without altering the scope of practice or affecting state practice laws. Social workers operating under the Compact must adhere to the laws and rules of the state where they practice, including compliance with the state's scope of practice.

I fervently urge you to support the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, recognizing its potential to profoundly impact mental health service accessibility and continuity of care.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Charity Mitchell
Licensed Master Social Worker