



February 13, 2024

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 204 – Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore strongly supports SB 204 – Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. This bill will allow out of state social workers to work and live in Maryland with far fewer administrative hurdles. We hope the General Assembly will support this initiative as a part of the solution to our state’s overall behavioral health workforce challenges.

Maryland has faced a behavioral health workforce shortage for many years and the pandemic only made this worse. Maryland has 49 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas, including much of western Maryland, southern Maryland, and the Eastern Shore.¹ While there are many causes to this shortage, a lack of workers currently residing Maryland is a significant contributor. Maryland has not regained the workers lost during the pandemic as quickly as other states and this has exacerbated the shortages that already existed.²

Most behavioral health providers have numerous open position that are going unfilled. This has been our experience locally in Baltimore City as well. Being unable to hire has hampered our ability to implement new initiatives and to improve the racial diversity of the workforce. Licensed social workers are especially needed for in-person roles such as mobile crisis teams.

SB 204 will make it easier for social workers from other states to take a job in Maryland. The need to obtain a new license to practice in Maryland can be a barrier to taking a job in a new state and the interstate compact will reduce this unnecessary hinderance. It will also allow out of state social workers to provide services to Marylanders more easily through telehealth.

This legislation is a well-designed initiative that will simplify the process for out of state social workers to be employed in Maryland. **We urge the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 204 to address the state’s behavioral health workforce needs.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

Endnotes:

¹ Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Health Workforce Shortage Areas Data Dashboard accessed January 29, 2024 at <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>.

² Office of the Comptroller. Maryland State of the Economy Report, 2023. Available at <https://www.marylandtaxes.gov/reports/static-files/SOTE.pdf>.