



January 28, 2025

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 174 – 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 supports SB 174 – 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. A recent comprehensive analysis found that there were 2,799 social workers employed in behavioral health settings in Maryland and an additional 2,675 would be needed by 2028 to meet the state’s needs.¹ Most behavioral health providers have numerous open positions that are going unfilled, and many current professionals are nearing retirement. This shortage has hindered our ability to implement new initiatives and to improve the racial diversity of the workforce locally in Baltimore and is also causing overall behavioral health costs to rise.

Maryland will need to implement a variety of strategies to address its behavioral health workforce shortage, but one strategy that does not have a fiscal cost for the state is making it easier for licensed professionals to work in Maryland. SB 174 puts such a strategy in place by directing Maryland to join the interstate social work licensure compact. The need to obtain a new license to practice in Maryland can discourage professionals from taking a job in a new state. The interstate compact would eliminate this unnecessary barrier to taking a Maryland job. 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 work in Maryland. **We urge the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 174 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 Maryland Health Care Commission. Investing in Maryland’s Behavioral Health Talent. October 2024. https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf