

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

FROM: Starling Butler Hathcock, LCSW-C

DATE: January 28, 2025

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 174 - Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

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

I sincerely thank you for considering my written statement in support of Senate Bill 174 on the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact for inclusion in the public hearing record. My name is Starling Hathcock, and I am a Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C) and the spouse of a Navy veteran. I reside and practice 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 to deliver ethical and safe care. The rigorous education and training received by mental health professionals, irrespective of state, coupled with mandatory continued education post-licensure, underscore the dedication to maintaining high standards in our field. Last year, I shared how this Compact could benefit three specific clients and 1000's like my clients. Sadly, I can no longer speak to how those clients are doing because Maryland currently lacks a Social Work Compact, limiting my ability to follow their progress.

Today, I want to share how this Compact would benefit me and countless others who have had to retell the intimate details of their trauma.

Not only am I a therapist in Frederick, but I am also a therapist currently in therapy here in Maryland. I am a survivor of sexual trauma, and my journey into the therapeutic world began long before I became a social worker. My first therapist was extraordinary. Without her support, I likely would not be sitting here today.

Unfortunately, our therapeutic relationship ended before my healing could truly begin—when my family relocated to another state. This painful cycle repeated with each move, as licensing barriers prevented me from continuing care with the same trusted professional. Each time, I was forced to rebuild rapport, trust, and support with a new therapist—a process that can feel overwhelming and deeply discouraging. For trauma survivors like me, retelling our story to a new therapist is uniquely challenging, as it requires revisiting painful experiences and navigating the emotional, psychological, and relational complexities that trauma leaves behind.

In 2009, my family finally relocated to Maryland. Since then, I have been fortunate to find a therapist I trust—a relationship I have maintained for years. Yet, even now, barriers remain.

When I travel out of state, I must cancel therapy sessions because my therapist is licensed only in Maryland. This underscores the ongoing limitations faced by individuals seeking continuity of care across state lines.

The Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact would be a pivotal step in addressing this issue. It would ensure continuity of care for both clients and social workers who move or travel due to family obligations, military service, or other life circumstances. By preserving the vital therapeutic relationship, the Compact would reduce the stigma and burden of repeatedly retelling traumatic histories and foster better outcomes for all involved.

The ability to practice across state lines is pivotal in addressing disparities in access to culturally competent mental and behavioral health services. Doing so can alleviate inequities related to socioeconomic status, (dis)ability status, gender diversity, sexuality, and other barriers that impede individuals from receiving adequate care. Clearing barriers holds particular importance in advocating for marginalized communities, ensuring they receive treatment and support, especially when in-person appointments may be challenging or finding a suitable clinician becomes a hurdle, such as during a pandemic.

Drawing inspiration from existing licensure compacts for various healthcare professions, including nurses, physical therapists, physicians, psychologists, and counselors, the Social Work Compact enhances licensure portability for practitioners. Simultaneously, it empowers state regulatory boards to better protect consumers by facilitating the seamless sharing of licensure information.

The Social Work Compact brings numerous benefits, impacting those needing critical mental health support and social workers. It achieves this by:

1. Facilitating mobility for social workers meeting uniform licensure requirements.
2. Expanding access to care for clients.
3. Ensuring continuity of care for clients and social workers during relocations or travel across state lines.
4. Simplifying the maintenance of certifications for military personnel and their spouses during relocations.
5. Safeguarding and strengthening the existing system of state licensure.

Notably, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact preserves each state's authority to regulate the profession. It does not alter the scope of practice or affect 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 passionately urge you to lend your support to the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, recognizing its potential to make a transformative impact on mental health service accessibility and continuity of care.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "SH" or "Starling Hathcock".

Starling Hathcock
Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C)
Frederick County, Maryland

