



Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc.

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SB 174 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Senate Finance Committee

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

I am Celia Serkin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. (MC Federation of Families), a family peer support organization serving diverse families in Montgomery County who have children, youth, and/or young adults with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring challenges. Our Certified Family Peer Specialists are parents who have raised or are currently raising children with these challenges. I am a Montgomery County resident. I have two children, now adults, with behavioral health challenges. My son has severe depression. My daughter has co-occurring challenges.

MC Federation of Families is pleased to support SB 174 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. The bill enters Maryland into the Social Work Licensure Compact for the purpose of authorizing regulated social workers who hold multistate licenses to practice social work in member states; establishes requirements for multistate licensure; establishes the Social Work Licensure Compact Commission; and provides for withdrawal from the Compact.

SB 174 is critically important for Maryland to be able to increase the number of social workers available to meet to the increased demand for mental health and substance use services across the lifespan. The workforce shortage in Maryland is drastic and future predictions severe. Every county in Maryland except two are designated by the federal government as either a partial or countywide Mental Health Shortage Area (MHPSA).¹ Data from Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent highlight an escalating crisis in access to mental health and substance use care.² According to the report, the state's current behavioral health workforce is 50 percent smaller than necessary to meet today's demand and 45 percent of the existing workforce is expected to leave the field by 2028. By 2028, Maryland will need 2,675 new social workers to work in behavioral health settings.

NAMI Maryland reports that 781,000 adults in Maryland have a mental health condition, 57,000 Marylanders age 12 – 17 have depression, and 45.5% of Marylanders age 12 – 17 who have depression did not receive any care in the last year.³ Maryland ranks among the top five states in terms of opioid-related overdose deaths, with particularly high rates of heroin-related deaths.⁴

In addition to needing more social workers now and in the future, there is a tremendous need for social workers who speak different languages; are representative of the given populations being served; and possess cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. There are many benefits of having social workers who speak the same language and share cultural similarities with those they are serving, such as improved communication, increased trust, better rapport, deeper understanding, more effective interventions, and positive outcomes. Families feel more comfortable sharing sensitive information and concerns with social workers who understand their background and perspective. Conversely, there are

negative impacts when families receive services from social workers who lack an understanding of their culture, values, and worldviews and who cannot speak their language. These include ineffective interventions, mistrust, lack of engagement, and misinterpretations of behavior, resulting in a failure to adequately address the family's needs and concern, hindering the therapeutic process, and potentially causing harm to the family.

MC Federation of Families urges the Senate Finance Committee to pass SB 174 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.

¹ Health Professional Shortage Areas: Mental Health, by County, July 2024-Maryland. Rural Health Information Hub. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=MD>

² Andy Hall, Aaron Korn, Kweilin Waller, and Josh Shapiro, PhD, with Trailhead Strategies, Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent: a needs assessment to inform the design of the behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund established by the Maryland legislature through Senate Bill 283, October 2024.

³ Mental Health in Maryland Fact Sheet, 2021. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

<https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/StateFactSheets/MarylandStateFactSheet.pdf>

⁴ Lyle Cooper R, Thompson J, Edgerton R, Watson J, MacMaster SA, Kalliny M, Huffman MM, Juarez P, Mathews-Juarez P, Tabatabai M, Singh KP. Modeling dynamics of fatal opioid overdose by state and across time. *Prev Med Rep.* 2020 Aug 26;20:101184. doi: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2020.101184. PMID: 32995141; PMCID: PMC7516293.