



DATE: January 28, 2025
BILL NO: Senate Bill 174
POSITION: Support

COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations
TITLE: Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 174 - Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.

Bill Summary: Senate Bill 174 enters Maryland into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. The compact officially came into effect on April 12, 2024, upon enactment in seven states. This milestone set in motion the appointment of commissioners from each state to form a compact commission tasked with implementation. A key component being an interstate database ensuring that social workers participating are compliant with all criteria. The target timeline for opening applications for social workers is in the fall of 2025. Currently, 22 states have enacted this compact, with pending legislation in 11 states, Maryland among them.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive, and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based, and community-based programs. Over 27,000 individuals receive services annually at Kennedy Krieger. We employ more than 2,600 persons who play a vital role in our mission to transform the lives of children with disorders of the brain.

At Kennedy Krieger, clinical social workers are part of interdisciplinary teams of professionals. From a multi-systemic perspective, social workers enable individuals and their families to utilize their natural strengths while managing the ongoing realities and stresses of disability, mental health, or medical conditions. Social workers provide the following clinical services, as determined by individual and family needs, through any one of the programs inpatient, outpatient, or community settings at Kennedy Krieger.

- Clinical evaluation of individual and family functioning
- Diagnostic evaluation of mental health conditions
- Development of individualized treatment plans
- Evidence-based individual, family, and group therapy and supportive counseling
- Parent training, support and stress management programs
- Educational advocacy
- Case management, coordination of care, and discharge planning

Rationale:

Social workers are an essential part of the care team. But, due to ongoing shortages, there is a lack of available individuals to serve in these positions. Before the pandemic, there was a global shortage in the healthcare workforce¹. Predictions forecast that employment demands in healthcare will grow faster this decade compared to all other occupations. This includes an increased need for social workers, with demand expected to increase 13% through 2029.²

While over ninety percent of the patients seen by social workers reside across Maryland, the use of telehealth has been beneficial for our Maryland families residing in Southern Maryland, Western Maryland, and the Eastern Shore. Using Telehealth in state as an alternative service delivery model has reduced costs for families related to lost time from work, gas/mileage costs, and other travel-associated expenses, reduced time out of school for appointments, increased participation in appointments by caregivers who are able to join sessions from work and has allowed patients to receive service in their natural setting.

¹ Figueroa CA, Harrison R, Chauhan A, Meyer L. Priorities and challenges for health leadership and workforce management globally: a rapid review. *BMC Health Services Research*. 2019;19(1)doi:10.1186/s12913-019-4080-7

² Source: www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm#tab-1

Out of State Services:

Kennedy Krieger Institute provides specialized services to patients nationally and internationally. In pre-pandemic times, families would need to plan to complete the potentially costly and time-consuming trip to Kennedy Krieger Institute to obtain the skilled services their child and/or family required. During the pandemic, the Telehealth service delivery model enabled our social workers to see patients from 14 states and the District of Columbia. This minimized the number of onsite visits required to receive a full interdisciplinary approach to evaluation and treatment.

Since the conclusion of pandemic waivers, our social workers are unable to provide specialized care through Telehealth to those who reside in other states unless they obtain additional licenses. Social workers across Kennedy Krieger are assigned to specific service delivery settings, like schools or multidisciplinary teams serving many unique conditions. The multi-D teams serve patients and families from out-of-state; the compact will allow continued follow-up with the medical team.

Maryland's participation in the Social Work Licensure Compact would serve to:

- increase client/patient access to specialized care,
- facilitate continuity of care when client/patient relocates (e.g., visits a parent or relative for an extended period, goes away for college) in a Compact state,
- certify that social workers licensed in other Social Work Licensure Compact states and treating Maryland patients have met acceptable standards of practice across education, training and experience,
- promote cooperation between Compact states in areas of licensure and regulation,
- offer a higher degree of consumer protection across state lines, and
- permit social workers to provide services to populations currently underserved or geographically isolated.

Enacting the Social Work Licensure Compact will allow families across participating states to have access to the highest quality of social workers available while also decreasing the burdens placed on the patient, family, and the system, and we thank Senator Benson and the Finance Committee for their leadership on this issue. It is time for Maryland to join the Social Work Compact to ensure access to mental health for all Maryland residents, and to ensure that Maryland social workers can provide telebehavioral health services to all their patients, including those in states participating in the Compact.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 174.