



January 28, 2025

COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee

BILL: SB 174 – Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

The Foundation is pleased to support SB 174 – Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. This bill would enter Maryland into the existing Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, currently comprised of 22 states, and allow social workers to hold a multistate license in order to practice across state lines.

Like many communities across the country, mental and behavioral health needs in Howard County have been on the rise and barriers remain to ensuring robust and equitable access to care. In our county’s most recent health assessment, the number of residents who reported experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety jumped significantly compared to the last survey in 2018, and only 16% reported receiving some type of treatment.ⁱ We also continue to see stark racial disparities in mental health. In the same survey, Black and Hispanic residents were much more likely than their White counterparts to report feeling a lack of interest or pleasure in doing things – as were residents with low income – in addition to feelings of being down, depressed or hopeless. There is also growing research that shows chronic stress and trauma due to racism exacerbates mental and behavioral health challenges for people of color.

At the same time, Maryland has faced a behavioral health workforce shortage for many years, which exacerbates the lack of access to care for our residents. Many behavioral health providers have open positions that are going unfilled. There are simply not enough providers in Maryland to meet our residents’ mental and behavioral health needs. In fact, a recent report commissioned by the Maryland Health Care Commission found that Maryland needs to attract 30,000 new behavioral health workers in order to meet unmet needs and to account for current workers expected to retire, leave the state or leave the field in the next several years.ⁱⁱ

SB 174 would bolster our behavioral health workforce by making it easier for social workers from other states to practice in Maryland (and vice versa) and to provide services to

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Marylanders via telehealth. The Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact reduces the burden and duplicative licensure requirements for social workers to practice in multiple states. With more providers able to practice in our state, Marylanders will have greater access to the care they need.

We strongly believe everyone should have access to compassionate mental health care – and a strong behavioral health workforce is critical to making this a reality. For this reason, the Horizon Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 174** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Howard County Health Assessment Survey, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.hclhic.org/community/data>

ⁱⁱ <https://marylandmatters.org/2024/12/02/maryland-needs-another-30000-behavioral-health-workers-to-meet-growing-demand/>