

Testimony of Ann Mazur, CEO of EveryMind,
in support of Bill 174, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact
before the Senate Finance Committee
January 28, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 174, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. My name is Ann Mazur, and I am the CEO of EveryMind, a nonprofit organization that has been at the forefront of mental health and wellness in Maryland for over 65 years. We provide direct services, education, and advocacy to ensure that individuals and families can access the mental health support they need. As you are undoubtedly aware, Maryland is experiencing a significant behavioral health workforce shortage. According to recent data, more than 60% of Maryland's jurisdictions qualify as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. This crisis is compounded by increasing demand for mental health services, driven by such factors as the rising rates of anxiety and depression among youth, and the ongoing opioid crisis. The shortage of qualified behavioral health professionals has left countless Marylanders waiting weeks—or even months—for critical care.

SB 174 introduces significant improvements to the licensing process for social workers, enhancing access to care and addressing these critical workforce challenges. By recognizing licenses from other states, the bill reduces unnecessary administrative hurdles and ensures that highly qualified professionals can quickly integrate into Maryland's workforce. This approach helps address workforce shortages while expanding access to essential social work services for Maryland residents. Additionally, the bill strengthens public safety by maintaining accountability to Maryland's laws and professional standards, ensuring that all practitioners meet the state's high expectations for care. These changes create a more efficient system that benefits both social workers and the communities they serve.

I also want to highlight how this bill directly addresses barriers that impede access to care for military families, a population we serve extensively through our ServingTogether program. Military spouses often face frequent relocations, requiring them to obtain new licenses in each state—a process that is not only time-consuming and costly but also deeply stressful.

At EveryMind, we see firsthand the devastating consequences of delayed or inaccessible mental health services. Our clinicians, who provide school-based mental health services in over 35 schools in Maryland, are stretched thin, with extended waitlists and concern for those individuals unable to receive services. Additionally, in response to the high demand for mental health services and the critical shortage of behavioral health professionals, we have stepped in to provide mental health literacy to three Maryland school districts, empowering educators, students, and families to recognize and address mental health concerns early, often filling gaps left by the lack of available staff. Meanwhile, our 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline call center continues to see high call volume, reflecting the growing need for immediate crisis support.

SB 174 is not just about addressing a workforce shortage; it's about saving lives. When individuals cannot access the care they need, they are more likely to experience worsening mental health conditions, crises that require hospitalization, or tragic outcomes like suicide. By bolstering the behavioral health workforce, this bill will help mitigate these risks and ensure that Marylanders receive the care they deserve.

In closing, I urge the committee to give SB 174 a favorable report. This legislation is a crucial investment in Maryland's behavioral health and crisis continuum infrastructure and will have a profound impact on the lives of individuals and families across our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.