

Senator Pamela Beidle
Senate Finance Committee (Chairperson)

House Bill 174 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact Senate Finance Committee.

January 28, 2025 at 1:00p.

Position: SUPPORT

Submitted by: Wholistic Living LLC

Wholistic Living LLC is a private clinical mental health practice specializing in trauma, addictions, and anxiety. We utilize EMDR therapy to address the multifaceted needs of individuals facing mental health and substance use challenges (collectively referred to as behavioral health).

I am grateful for the opportunity to provide this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 174. This critical legislation proposes that Maryland join the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, enabling social workers licensed in Maryland to practice across state lines in other compact member states, and vice versa. This initiative is essential to addressing the profound behavioral health crisis currently affecting our state.

As a clinician, I have witnessed firsthand the growing and urgent demand for mental health services. My practice has seen a marked increase in referrals, particularly for neurologically based trauma care such as EMDR therapy. Despite my best efforts to meet the community's needs, I now maintain a waiting list of over 10 individuals and am inundated with consultation calls. Sadly, many of these individuals must wait weeks—or even months—for care during a time when timely intervention can make all the difference.

The behavioral health crisis in Maryland is not anecdotal—it is documented and escalating. A recent report, "Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent," highlights that in 2023, Maryland employed approximately 34,613 behavioral health workers, yet faced a shortfall of 18,222 professionals needed to meet current demands. By 2028, an additional 14,565 workers will be required to keep pace with growing demand, with attrition rates exacerbating the issue.

The challenge is particularly acute among social workers. In 2023, Maryland employed an estimated 2,799 social workers in behavioral health settings. To meet the growing need and replace those leaving the field, we will need to attract an additional 2,675 social workers by 2028—a staggering number that cannot be achieved under the current system.

Compounding this issue is a troubling trend in education and retention. Degree completions from Maryland's social work master's programs have declined by 9% since 2019, and far too many graduates are either leaving the state or working outside the behavioral health field entirely. Since 2014, 70% of Masters of Social Work and Clinical and Counseling Psychology graduates from Maryland universities have not been retained in jobs providing behavioral health services to Maryland residents.

The General Assembly has taken commendable steps in recent years to address these issues, but the crisis remains far from resolved. We must be bold and innovative in our approach to expanding access to care and supporting the behavioral health workforce. Interstate licensure compacts are a proven strategy that can yield immediate and meaningful results.

By passing SB 174, we can:

- **Broaden the pool of qualified professionals** who can provide care to Maryland residents.
- **Strengthen partnerships across state lines**, allowing for a seamless delivery of care in an increasingly mobile and interconnected world.
- **Provide Marylanders with access to timely, high-quality mental health and substance use care**, ensuring they are not left waiting for help during their most vulnerable moments.

The need for SB 174 is both practical and moral. Our communities are in crisis, and every day that passes without action is another day that countless Marylanders go without the care they so desperately need.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on SB 174. The health and well-being of our residents depend on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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