

Testimony by Ann Mazur, CEO of EveryMind,  
in Support of House Bill 345, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact Bill  
before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

January 23, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 345, 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 the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, 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. House Bill 345 represents a vital step toward addressing this workforce crisis by expanding loan repayment programs, increasing funding for workforce development, and creating new training pipelines. By investing in the recruitment and retention of behavioral health professionals, this legislation will help ensure that Marylanders can access timely, high-quality care.

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, often managing caseloads that exceed recommended limits. 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 has seen a significant increase in call volume, reflecting the growing need for immediate crisis support.

HB 345 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 HB 345 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.