

Katherine Brown, LCSW-C

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TO: The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair
Members, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Joanne C. Benson

FROM: Katherine Brown, LCSW-C

DATE: January 28, 2025

RE: **SUPPORT** - House Bill 345 - Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

Dear Madam Chair, Beidle and Distinguished Members of the Finance Committee:

I sincerely thank you for considering my written statement supporting Senate Bill 174 on the "Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact" for inclusion in the public hearing record. I am Katherine Brown, a Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical (LCSW-C) residing and practicing in Howard County, Maryland.

The significance of the Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact resonates deeply with me due to the substantial gap between the demand for mental health services and the limited number of licensed providers available to deliver ethical and safe care. The rigorous education and training received by mental health professionals, irrespective of state, coupled with mandatory continued education post-licensure, underscore the dedication to maintaining high standards in our field.

The ability to practice across state lines is pivotal in addressing disparities in access to culturally competent mental and behavioral health services. Doing so can alleviate

inequities related to socioeconomic status, (dis)ability status, gender diversity, sexuality, and other barriers that impede individuals from receiving adequate care. Clearing barriers holds particular importance in advocating for marginalized communities, ensuring they receive treatment and support, especially when in-person appointments may be challenging or finding a suitable clinician becomes a hurdle, such as during a pandemic.

For me personally I see adolescents and adults heading off to college. Repeatedly I must terminate a strong therapeutic relationship when they go to college in a different state. They then must find a new therapist licensed in that state but then have lack of care over lengthy breaks when returning to their home states. They can have a home state therapist and a college state therapist, but this hinders their therapeutic process. It would be instrumental to be able to continue to provide care to my clients in this demographic.

Drawing inspiration from existing licensure compacts for various healthcare professions, including nurses, physical therapists, physicians, psychologists, and counselors, the Social Work Compact enhances licensure portability for practitioners. Simultaneously, it empowers state regulatory boards to better protect consumers by facilitating the seamless sharing of licensure information.

The Social Work Compact brings numerous benefits, impacting those needing critical mental health support and social workers. It achieves this by:

1. Facilitating mobility for social workers meeting uniform licensure requirements.
2. Expanding access to care for clients.
3. Ensuring continuity of care for clients and social workers during relocations or travel across state lines.
4. Simplifying the maintenance of certifications for military personnel and their spouses during relocations.
5. Safeguarding and strengthening the existing system of state licensure.

Notably, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact preserves each state's authority to regulate the profession. It does not alter the scope of practice or affect state practice laws. Social workers operating under the Compact must adhere to the laws and rules of the state where they practice, including compliance with the state's scope of practice.

I passionately urge you to lend your support to the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, recognizing its potential to make a transformative impact on mental health service accessibility and continuity of care.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Katherine Brown, LCSW-C