

**Health and Government Operations Committee**

**January 23, 2025**

**House Bill 345**

**Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact**

**\*\*\*SUPPORT\*\*\***

To the Honorable Health and Government Operations Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) - Maryland Chapter. Founded in 1955, the National Association of Social Workers is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, create and maintain professional standards for social workers, and advance social policies.

We at the NASW - Maryland Chapter would like to express our enthusiastic support for HB 345, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, sponsored by Delegate Kerr and Delegate Woods.

NASW-MD represents the interests of social workers across the state, advocating for their professional development, ethical practice, and the highest standards of care for the individuals and communities we serve. The *Maryland Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment* recently highlighted a critical shortage of behavioral health workers in the state, a shortage that is expected to worsen in the coming years. This growing gap in the workforce is exacerbated by significant disparities: the assessment found that Hispanic and Latino individuals are underrepresented in the field, while Black or African American workers are disproportionately concentrated in lower-paying positions.

As these workforce challenges continue to evolve, the need for an expanded, diverse, and mobile workforce has never been more pressing. The proposed Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact directly addresses these needs by allowing social workers who hold licenses from member states to practice across state lines. This would not only streamline the licensure process but would also help close the gap in service provision, particularly in underserved communities, by increasing the mobility of social workers and improving access to professional services.

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Further benefits of the compact include:

- Enhancing the mobility of social workers
- Improving access to professional social work services
- Improving continuity of care when clients travel or relocate
- Supporting relocating military spouses and families
- Enhancing public safety
- Creating a data system to track license status, investigative information, and adverse actions

By fostering multistate licensure, this compact is a forward-thinking approach that will not only facilitate the delivery of care but will also help diversify and strengthen the behavioral health workforce in Maryland, particularly in communities that face systemic disparities.

In the NASW Code of Ethics, our second ethical standard under the *Social Workers' Ethical Responsibility to Clients* section states that “social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals.” For NASW, our “clients” are social workers. By supporting this compact, we are affirming social workers’ right to determine how they would like to be licensed in other states.

The NASW Maryland Chapter fully endorses the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact and urges the committee to support this critical legislation that would have Maryland join the 22 other states who adopted the Compact in the last year. We believe that its passage will not only benefit social workers but, more importantly, enhance the quality of care and support available to individuals and families in need—particularly those impacted by the workforce shortages and inequities highlighted by the Maryland Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment.

We ask that you give a **favorable report to HB 345**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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