

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee
Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Sara Feola

RE: Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact

I am an LCSW-C. I am writing to express my strong support for the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact (Compact), which will be introduced during the 2025 Legislative Session.

I am currently licensed in Maryland, DC and Virginia best serve this area, as many people live and work in more than one of these states. In order to provide services in all three states, I financially have to pay approximately \$600 in licensing fees, not including any of the finances I need to maintain the licensure (continuing education credits, which can vary between states), higher insurance fees/rates, and the funds necessary to renew business licenses in multiple. Because I take insurance, my margins are not high, however I am committed to providing these services to people who need it most and can often not afford to pay out of pocket. The financial impact is significant for a small (one person) business, but more than the financial burden, the inability to support my clients when they are not in one of those three states is often detrimental to their medical care.

As a psychotherapist that specializes in trauma, sexual violence, gun violence and grief, the inability to serve clients when they return home for the holidays, for funerals, etc., often the times they need the support the most, negatively impacts the clients' ability to heal. It can exacerbate feelings of isolation and hopelessness when their most trusted support is not allowed to speak to them (as I risk losing my license). Imagine going home to grieve the death of your child due to gun violence, and not being able to speak to your therapist if your emotions escalate or you are emotionally dysregulated. Imagine returning to your childhood home, where you experienced abuse and/or neglect, and not being allowed to speak to the one person you have finally learned to trust. Or imagine, building a connection and making progress in processing your trauma, and you unexpectedly have to move, you must start the process over again with a new therapist, re-telling deep seated traumas, which in doing so, can often re-traumatize a client by having to relive their story again in a space they have not yet developed trust and safety in. If your spouse is in the military, and is moved to a new base, you will have to get a new therapist. A therapist and a clients relationship is sacred and study after study has shown this relationship is the key to a persons ability to heal; having this disrupted or the fear of future disruption, significantly impedes clients ability to recover from trauma and grief.

With natural disasters happening more often, like the current wildfires in California, I (and many of my colleagues) would have loved to be able to offer our therapeutic services pro bono to people affected, particularly when therapists in those states may be pausing their own services to rebuild their lives. However, that is not possible. These arbitrary borders prevent our ability to do our job successfully and to provide services to all that need them.

This legislation allows social workers licensed in one compact member state to practice in other participating states without having to obtain separate licenses in each of those states. The Compact provides several key benefits:

1. **Increased Mobility for Social Workers:** Social workers can practice across state lines in other Compact member states, increasing their professional opportunities and the ability to move for personal or career reasons without the need for additional licensure.
2. **Addressing Workforce Shortages:** The Compact helps address the shortage of mental health professionals by making it easier for qualified social workers to practice in states with high demand for services, particularly in areas with clinician shortages.
3. **Support for Military Families:** The Compact is especially beneficial for military personnel and their families, as it allows them to maintain their social work licenses when relocating due to service duties, avoiding delays and complications when they move between states.
4. **Improved Access to Care:** By allowing social workers to practice across state lines, the Compact enhances access to mental health services, particularly in underserved or rural areas. It also ensures that patients can continue care with the same social worker if they move to another participating state, promoting continuity of care.
5. **Streamlined Processes:** The Compact creates a shared system of data and standards, which reduces administrative burdens for licensure boards, speeds up the application process, and ensures that state licensure standards are consistently met across participating states.

The Compact is a significant step forward for our profession. I hope you will join me in supporting this important piece of legislation to help strengthen our behavioral health workforce and improve the well-being of those we serve.

Sincerely,

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