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Delegate Assembly Representative.  
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To the Honorable Health and Government Operations Committee,

I write to strongly support HB 345, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, sponsored by Delegate Kerr and Delegate Woods. As a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) in Maryland and a Delegate Assembly Representative for NASW-Maryland, I have experienced firsthand the challenges of navigating licensure across states. This compact is critical to increasing workforce mobility, addressing Maryland's behavioral health workforce shortage, and expanding access to care for those in need.

Like many social workers, I faced significant barriers in obtaining licensure across states. After multiple attempts to pass the LCSW exam, Illinois granted me my LCSW through an alternative pathway, recognizing my experience and qualifications. When I later applied for licensure in Virginia, they accepted my Illinois LCSW without issue. However, Maryland declined to recognize my LCSW, preventing me from practicing at the clinical level despite my proven competency elsewhere. This unnecessary restriction not only affected my career but also limited my ability to serve Maryland residents in need of care.

Maryland is already experiencing a severe behavioral health workforce shortage, as highlighted in the Maryland Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment. The Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact provides a practical and immediate solution by:

- Increasing workforce mobility, allowing social workers to serve where they are needed most
- Expanding access to behavioral health services, especially in underserved communities
- Ensuring continuity of care for clients who relocate across state lines
- Supporting military spouses and professionals who frequently move
- Enhancing public safety through a shared licensure database to track credentials and disciplinary actions

The NASW Code of Ethics emphasizes our duty to respect client self-determination. Just as we advocate for our clients' right to make informed decisions about their care, we must also advocate for social workers' ability to practice without unnecessary barriers.

As a Delegate Assembly Representative for NASW-Maryland, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 345. This legislation will modernize the licensure process, strengthen the profession, and expand access to vital social work services across Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Lawrence Fianko, LMSW

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lawrence Fianko', written over a horizontal line.

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