

TO: Maryland General Assembly, Health and Government Operations Committee
Chair, Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Co-Chair, Delegate Bonnie Cullison
FROM: Jennifer E. Klingler, LCSW-C
DATE: January 21st 2025

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

Dear Chairperson Pena-Melnyk and Distinguished Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for considering this written testimony in SUPPORT of HB 345, The Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.

I have worked in the field of mental health since 1997, graduated with a Master of Social Work degree in 2001 and obtained advanced state licensure in 2003. I have worked in numerous settings including crisis response, outpatient treatment, inpatient hospital treatment, psychiatric research and now own an independent private practice in Baltimore, MD.

Social workers are a key component of our country's mental health system, which is woefully lacking providers. I trust that the committee members are aware of the many ramifications of the consequences of inadequate access to treatment. The need for more access to professional licensed mental health care providers has never been greater.

The Interstate Compact increases the number of available clinicians, often concentrated in more populated areas, to areas with greater need and fewer clinicians. It would also allow providers to be able to offer their specific expert care to clients in participating states, where specialized services may not be as accessible.

I have a specialty in helping families affected by serious and persistent mental illness' such as Schizophrenia and Bipolar disorder. With early care and intervention, patient outcomes are improved, there are fewer strains on our hospital and legal systems, and reduced rates of disability. Families often contact me from other states asking for family therapy to help them and their loved one manage these conditions. These services can effectively be provided via telehealth. Location/distance are no longer barriers to obtaining expert care. However, without the Interstate Compact, I cannot provide them with any direct service. And so, families are they are often left with their underfunded and understaffed community mental health centers, few of which are able to provide extensive family therapy with experienced clinicians, if an appointment can be obtained at all. These families deserve specialized expert care that I could provide.

Thank you Delegate Kerr and Delegate Woods for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I am grateful for the committee's consideration of my testimony in support of HB345 and urge you to vote in favor.

Sincerely,



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