

TO: The Honorable Joselyn Pena-Melnyk, Chair  
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee  
The Honorable Ken Kerr & Jamila Woods

FROM: Andrea Creel, LCSW-C

DATE: January 23, 2025

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

Dear Madam Chair, Pena-Melnyk and Distinguished Members of the House and Government Operations Committee:

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I sincerely thank you for considering my written statement supporting House Bill 345 the "Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact" for inclusion in the public hearing record. My name is Andrea Creel, I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW-C) licensed and residing in Montgomery County, Maryland. I am writing to you to share my professional perspective and **strong support for passage of the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact (HB 345)**, provide information about how any delay in passage of this bill harms our most vulnerable citizens in Maryland, and explain how timely passage of this bill would provide immeasurable aid and support to these same mental health consumers in our state.

In particular, in my testimony I want to focus your attention on how current laws and **the lack of an Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact is negatively impacting victims of intimate partner violence in Maryland on a daily basis and how passage of this bill could ameliorate these concerns and lead to greater physical and emotional health outcomes for survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse in Maryland.** My professional role and background is as a therapist at a non-profit organization in Maryland that provides services and support to victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), including clinical mental health services provided by licensed social workers and my area of expertise is providing trauma-focused therapy to IPV survivors.

When a person is a victim of IPV, they are under extreme stress and facing immediate life-or-death safety concerns. The need for uninterrupted and consistent emotional support and mental health care is essential for individuals during this time period and can sometimes be the key to an individual feeling empowered to leave a dangerous relationship and find a safer environment for themselves and their children. There are many hurdles faced by these individuals, and contingencies and back-up plans are often needed to be put in place.

Sometimes the safety planning includes the need to flee temporarily or permanently to another state.

**Currently, when a victim of IPV flees the state, they lose access to the mental health provider with whom they have an established relationship and from whom they are receiving essential emotional support.** In the case of a victim of IPV, this is especially devastating because one of the tactics that abusive partners use is to isolate their victims. Many victims have little or no social support other than the support of their therapist. One of the goals in therapy for these clients is to help the client re-build their social support network. However, at the time a victim is fleeing the danger of IPV and may need to leave the state for safety, that step has often not occurred yet.

Leaving an abusive relationship is hard. Statistics say that, on average, it takes a person 7 tries before they are successfully able to leave. **Right now, we are tying the hands of survivors in Maryland and making it more difficult for them to successfully leave an abusive relationship by taking away the very support that they need and deserve at a critical time when the safety plan they choose or is forced upon them due to circumstances beyond their control includes the need to flee to another state on an emergency and time-sensitive basis.**

**Finding a new therapist is hard and often deleterious to the success of therapy.** Decades of research shows that therapeutic alliance and rapport is the number one predictor of success in therapy. Having an established provider to provide continuity of care is important, especially when victims of IPV are already dealing with so many new realities and the challenging logistics of having to set up new schools for their children, find new healthcare providers, get connected to food stamps and other social service programs in their new community and other related tasks and stressors involved in moving to a new state. Sometimes these individuals have to move states multiple times for safety reasons - currently that means locating and accessing mental health services with new providers over and over again which also can lead to re-traumatization of having to tell their story and disclose their trauma to new people multiple times in short succession. **It is already a difficult choice to choose to leave an abusive partner, the pros and cons list can be long. The recognition that in addition to having to do the hard work of fleeing an abusive partner which already puts them at a temporarily higher risk of death AND lose their mental health provider at the same time, may tip the scales back to a victim deciding to stay in the relationship instead of flee for safety. When in the throws of daily abuse and risk of their lives, sometimes the risk of losing the one person who they can depend on for support, their therapist, is too much.**

The passage of the Maryland Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact (HB 345) would eliminate one of the stressors and challenges facing victims of Intimate Partner Violence at a particularly vulnerable and scary time in their lives. **A time when the need for consistent mental health support is especially essential.** A consistent and stable mental health provider can be a lifeline, a beacon of hope, and a source of stability for a victim in an otherwise chaotic, dangerous, and uncharted time in their lives.

If HB 345, The Maryland Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact is passed, it will mean that victims of Intimate Partner Violence do not need to take into account the drawback of losing consistent social support and critical mental health services during one of the most dangerous, stressful, and vulnerable periods in their lives. It will allow these individuals the continuity of mental health care they need and deserve, and it will help save the lives of adults and children in Maryland who suffer under the trauma of experiencing and witnessing Intimate Partner Violence in the home.

Thank you for your consideration and taking the time to reflect on how the passage of the Maryland Interstate Social Work Compact would enhance and improve the lives of Marylanders who are victims of Intimate Partner Violence, and how its delay in passage will lead to the direct harm of some of our most vulnerable citizens in Maryland. **I strongly urge you to vote in favor of HB 345 The Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact.**

I appreciate your consideration and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
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