

**Senate Bill 174 Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact**

Finance Committee

January 28, 2025

**Position: SUPPORT**

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 174.

SB 174 enters Maryland into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact whereby Maryland social workers can deliver care in other compact states, and vice versa. The state has already adopted compacts for professional counselors and psychologists.

Data from an [alarming new assessment](#) of Maryland's behavioral health workforce highlights an escalating crisis in access to mental health and substance use care. According to the report<sup>1</sup>, which was completed pursuant to legislation the General Assembly passed in 2023 ([SB 283/HB 418](#)), the state's current behavioral health workforce is 50 percent smaller than necessary to meet today's demand and 45 percent of the existing workforce is expected to leave the field by 2028.

The scale of this workforce crisis is particularly striking among Maryland social workers. In 2023, there were an estimated 2,799 social workers employed in behavioral health settings. In order to meet the current demand and replace workers leaving the field, Maryland will need to attract an additional 2,675 social workers by 2028. This will be a tall challenge given recent graduation trends and employment patterns. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, degree completions from Maryland's social work master's programs have declined nine percent from their 2019 peaks. Further, only a small portion of graduates from behavioral health-related and nursing education programs actually work jobs in Maryland providing behavioral health services to residents. Seventy percent of Masters of Social Work and Clinical and Counseling Psychology graduates from Maryland universities since 2014 are either working in other industries in Maryland, are employed out of state, or not working one year after degree completion.

The General Assembly has taken several important steps in recent years to streamline the delivery of quality behavioral health care and bolster the state's behavioral health workforce, but we are not out of this crisis yet. We must employ every strategy at our disposal to address the unmet need, and interstate licensure compacts are one of those strategies. They increase access to care by adding depth to local labor pools.

SB 174 will help ensure Marylanders can access mental health and substance use care when and where needed. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup> *Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent*. Maryland Health Care Commission. October 2024.  
[https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md\\_bh\\_workforce\\_rpt\\_SB283.pdf](https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf)

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