

**Senate Bill 409 Health Occupations - Clinical Marriage and Family Therapists - Reciprocal  
Licensure Requirements**

Finance Committee

February 13, 2024

**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 409.

SB 409 expedites and streamlines the Maryland licensure process for marriage and family therapists (MFT) who already hold a license in good standing from another state. Licensure requirements of other states are similar to those in Maryland, including requirements for a licensure exam, graduation from an accredited program, and a number of supervised hours. The applicant would still have to pass an exam on Maryland law and ethics and pass a criminal history records check.

Maryland is in the midst of a behavioral health workforce crisis. Federal data<sup>1</sup> released just last month found that Maryland has 64 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs)<sup>2</sup>, including 14 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20% of residents are getting their mental health needs met, impact over 1.8 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that 16 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers, with a number that are considerably lower.<sup>3</sup>

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 reciprocal licensure is one of those strategies. It increases access to care by adding depth to local labor pools.

SB 409 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> <https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport>

<sup>2</sup> A HPSA is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in one of three categories – primary care, dental health, and mental health

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/maryland?year=2022&measure=Mental+Health+Providers&tab=1>

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