

Maria Friedman
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In Support of H7350: The Social Work Interstate Compact Bill

Dear House members,

As both the Secretary of the Board of The National Association of Social Workers - Rhode Island Chapter (NASW-RI) and as a licensed social worker (LCSW) myself, I strongly support the passage of House Bill 7350. Linked here is a [fact sheet](#) for you to take a look at. Firstly, there is a current crisis in Rhode Island and nationally of a shortage of mental health professionals, including social workers, in front-line roles at agencies and organizations providing direct services to clients in need. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing gaps in mental health needs of various vulnerable populations in the state. The passage of this bill could allow practitioners from surrounding states such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, etc. to more easily become licensed in Rhode Island and help fill in the gaps of care. **In other words, there are hundreds of qualified mental health professionals who may not be currently licensed in Rhode Island, but if it's easier for them to become licensed through this bill, they could be working on the front-lines now (or through telehealth) to address the mental health needs of our communities, but instead they cannot fill these roles because it is such a hassle to get licensed in multiple states. On the flip side, more Rhode Island practitioners could get licensed in surrounding states and help folks that may be just across a state border, but work in Rhode Island, etc.**

As a graduate of the Masters of Social Work (MSW) program of Rhode Island College, we learned about barriers to accessibility. It is definitely a barrier if someone cannot get care, especially given long waiting lists and lack of practitioners. For example, I have several social work friends who work at an agency or office in Rhode Island but close to the border with MA, and unfortunately clients just a few minutes from their office who live in MA cannot seek services, because these social workers aren't licensed in the state of MA. The passage of this bill would make it easier, and create a streamlined process for how a qualified practitioner could obtain a license in another state, thus being able to serve more clients in need. **If this bill passes, Rhode Island would get a seat at the decision-making table to decide how this interstate compact would function, the rules and procedures, etc, giving RI a say in the future of social work.**

We urge you to support this bill so that mental health professionals, in particular social workers, will be able to execute their mission of serving the needs of vulnerable populations at much greater levels across the state and reach folks in surrounding areas who live close to Rhode Island, commute to work in Rhode Island, etc. In the long term, this bill could help improve the mental health outcomes of our communities, and in turn improve the quality of life, personal development, and economic success of our communities. When people can access the care they need from professionals without having to be on waiting lists for months, especially if they are going through a severe crisis, they will be able to in turn grow in many areas of their life and contribute more fully to our society.

Sincerely,

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