

February 16, 2021

The Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky, Chairperson

EHEA Committee

Maryland Senate

11 Bladen Street

Room 2, West Wing

Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **SUPPORT FOR SB 568** – Health Care Practitioners - Telehealth - Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners

Dear Chairperson Pinsky and Distinguished Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I want to thank you for taking my written statement of support for SB 568 on telehealth & out-of-state health care practitioners to be entered into the public hearing record. My name is Melissa Wesner and I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who owns a group counseling practice in Towson, Maryland.

Telebehavioral health modalities are important to me because the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us it's many benefits. Telehealth has been keeping clients and therapists safe in the midst of a pandemic. It has ensured continued access to mental health tx during a pandemic, and it has allowed people who live in rural areas with limited providers to access counseling services anywhere in their state. It is crucial that telehealth continues to receive support and that insurance companies continue to pay for this service at the same rate as regular in-person sessions.

We are still in the throes of a global pandemic and the need for health care and mental health services has never been greater. COVID-19 has revealed systemic flaws in our mental health services for providers and clients alike. It is imperative that we remove barriers to life saving services in a responsible and urgent manner.

This bill will authorize an out-of-state health care practitioner to provide telebehavioral health services to a patient located in the state in accordance with the state practice act. This legislation also requires the health occupations board to register an out-of-state health care practitioner, allowing for necessary oversight and monitoring of out-of-state practice.

While we are working to upload and implement the Counseling Compact in this state and throughout the U.S., this immediate action, removing barriers to critical supports, is essential for the wellbeing of Maryland residents, families, and a social services system overburdened by staggering need.

I strongly urge you to support telebehavioral health services and SB 568.

Sincerely,

Melissa Wesner, LCPC
828 Dulaney Valley Road, Suite 12
Towson, MD 21204