



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 24, 2021

House Bill 540 Interstate Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Morgan, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in **SUPPORT** of House Bill 540 Interstate Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact.

MRHA supports this legislation that facilitates the entrance of Maryland occupational therapists into the Interstate Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact. Further, MRHA supports the general purpose of this compact in that it improves the public's access to occupational therapy services and improves on data management practices necessary to maintain this compact.

The formation of this compact would positively impact rural Marylanders access to quality occupational health services while promoting health equity across the state. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, rural Marylanders face unique barriers to equitable and quality health services. The integration of more occupational therapists into this compact will help to achieve greater health equity and advanced data management practices to inform on provider details across rural Maryland and beyond.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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