

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 571** – Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact

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

I want to thank you for taking my written statement of support for SB 571 on the “Counseling Compact” to be entered into the public hearing record. My name is Maya Georgieva and I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Maryland as well as a Licensed Professional Counselor in Virginia. I reside in Arlington, Virginia and I practice in Falls Church, Virginia. In addition, I teach full-time in a CACREP-accredited graduate counseling program at Messiah University in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Since 2015, I have actively served the Maryland Counseling Association (MCA).

This Compact is important to me because as a licensed counselor I am ethically obligated to advocate for my clients. As an active member of the Maryland Counseling Association, I hope to represent the voice of our members. I have witnessed firsthand how individuals who have to travel from one state to another during the pandemic, have to discontinue counseling. I have felt helpless and discouraged to see adolescents and adults who have made great strides under my care, suffer exacerbated symptoms once they leave the state. Once a client develops a relationship with a counselor, they may not consider or have a difficult time re-starting therapy in another state with a new professional. The current restrictions for practicing telemental health within one’s state provide an unnecessary barrier for many people who are already struggling.

As a professor teaching in an online graduate program, I have also seen the struggle of our students and future professionals who complete field experiences in one state and after moving, realize they have to meet additional criteria to become licensed and be able to practice. The demand for counseling services is growing and removing the state restrictions will ultimately allow more people to get the help they need.

Much like existing licensure compacts for nurses, physical therapists, physicians, psychologists and EMS personnel, the Counseling Compact will increase licensure portability for practitioners while allowing state regulatory boards to better protect consumers through enhanced sharing of licensure information.

The Counseling Compact will benefit those in need of critical lifesaving mental health support and counselors by:

- Enhancing mobility for counselors who meet uniform licensure requirements;
- Increasing access to care for clients;
- Ensuring continuity of care when clients or counselors relocate or travel to other states;

- Allowing military personnel and spouses to easily maintain certifications when relocating;
- Preserving and strengthening the current system of state licensure.

The Counseling Compact preserves each state's authority to regulate the profession. It does not alter scope of practice or impact state practice law. Counselors utilizing the Compact must abide by the laws and rules of the state in which they are practicing, including adhering to that state's scope of practice.

I strongly urge you to support this Counseling Compact.

Sincerely,

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