

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 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).

Telebehavioral health modalities are 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.

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.

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.

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,

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