



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

January 26, 2021

Senate Bill 139 Interstate Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Senator Carozza, Senator Beidle, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 139 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.

According to Maryland law, "many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to... inadequate access to quality health care and other services" (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b). The formation of this compact would positively impact rural Marylanders access to quality occupational health services while promoting health equity among rural and non-rural populations 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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