

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 Melissa Wesner and I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who owns a group counseling practice in Towson, Maryland.

This Compact is important to me because counselors and clients are more mobile than ever. This compact will increase the likelihood that clinicians can continue working with their clients without interrupting their care when the client moves out of state. It would also mean that therapists are able to meet with their clients while they are out of state for work or family. At present, the current laws result in gaps when clients go out of state temporarily, and it results in clients needing to find new providers when they move. Gone are the days when people grow up in one place and stay there for the rest of their lives. Our professions and the legislation that guides them need to change with the times, so that they reflect people’s real lives.

As we have seen with the temporary guidelines in place for COVID, flexibility to practice between states is incredibly important. For example, COVID and state guidelines that prohibit practicing counseling between state lines has resulted in college students needing to find new providers at the start of the pandemic when they were forced to move back home with family. This alone demonstrates the need for greater flexibility and change. COVID has shown mental health professionals, insurance companies, and the world that new technologies that allow for telehealth, online medical appointments, work from home, and schooling from home are vital. It has shown that we can be more flexible than we once were.

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,

Melissa Wesner, LCPC  
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