

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Del. Shane Pendergrass, Chairperson
Health and Government Operations
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen St. RM. 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **SUPPORT FOR HB 732** – Health Care Practitioners - Telehealth - Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners

Dear Chairperson Pendergrass and Distinguished Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

I want to thank you for taking my written statement of support for HB 732 on telehealth & out-of-state health care practitioners to be entered into the public hearing record. My name is Sara Pula and I am a Counselor Educator and Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who resides and practices in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

Telebehavioral health modalities are important to me because they allow counselors to provide services not only during times of public health crises (such as during the COVID-19 pandemic) but to clients who struggle to access mental health services. Some of these individuals do not have easy access to transportation, have small windows of time during which they can come to counseling, or have other responsibilities that make this extremely hard (i.e., caring for young children, work schedules, etc). We have seen a huge increase in participation rates through the provision of telehealth counseling. Not only do individuals and families as a whole benefit from such participation, but our local communities and society as well.

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 HB 732.

Sincerely,

Sara Pula, PhD, LCPC ACS

President-Elect, Maryland Counseling Association
1179 Bay Highlands Drive, Annapolis, MD