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Testimony in Support of
House Bill 736 – Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact
Health and Government Operations Committee
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The Rural Maryland Council **Supports** HB736 - Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact. The purpose of HB736 is to create a compact of licensed professional counselors. The compact will allow counselors who are licensed in their home state to also be able to practice within the other states in the compact. This compact will only come into effect after ten states enact the compact as law. Each state that wants to enter the Compact must meet certain requirements, such as having certain educational and legal requirements set for a counselor to be licensed in the state. A counselor that wants to provide services to one of the member states must also meet certain requirements, such as being licensed by their home state, meeting educational requirements, paying any fees, and meeting any jurisdictional requirements of the remote state where they are seeking to practice.

The goal of the Compact is to increase access to professional counseling services by recognizing licensees from other states. By allowing a licensed counselor that is licensed in another state to practice in remote states through the Compact, it will allow for more access to licensed counselors, specifically in the areas that lack these types of specialty services. Rural areas tend to lack access to specialty healthcare, including access to mental health services. The bill will also allow for counselors to provide telehealth services to remote states. This once again would help the rural areas of the membership states. Because many licensed counselors may not be located near the residents of rural areas, rural residents are often forced to go without getting the counseling they need. Expanding the number of licensed counselors available will allow for more rural residents to have access to the specific counselor that best suits their needs.

While the country as a whole is facing a shortage in mental healthcare workers, these shortages are the worst in rural and non-metropolitan areas. According to the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, 65% of non-metropolitan counties do not have a psychiatrist compared to only 27% of metropolitan counties, and 47% of non-metropolitan counties do not have access to a psychologist compared to only 19% of metropolitan counties.

HB736 would allow for more access to counselors for those who are in need of them by allowing counselors who are already licensed in their home state to provide counseling to individuals in other membership states. The Council respectfully asks for your **favorable support** of HB736.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"