



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 18, 2021

House Bill 736 Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, House Speaker, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 571 Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact.

MRHA supports this legislation that facilitates the entrance of Maryland professional counselors into the Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact. Further, MRHA supports the general purpose of this compact in that it improves the public's access to counseling services and improves on data management practices necessary to maintain this compact.

Rural Marylanders encounter many barriers to accessing behavioral health services. The formation of this compact would positively impact rural communities' access to quality counseling services, while promoting health equity among rural and non-rural populations across the state. The integration of Maryland counselors 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.

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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