

February 8, 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 Cecil Cunigan and I am a Board Certified Clinical pastoral Counselor who resides in Carroll County and practices in Carroll, Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties.

Telebehavioral health modalities are important to me because they provide an effective alternative to in-person counseling/therapy so much needed during these unsettling times of isolation and increasing anxiety. Mental health care has been limited by the pandemic but telemental health is proving to be an effective and safe way to deliver much needed support to those most in need. The majority of my clients are minorities and people with low incomes who are disproportionately being affected by pandemic-related job losses and social stressors. Telebehavioral health helps to reduce the barriers my clients are already facing and improve their ability to get the support they need.

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,

Cecil B. Cunigan, LCPC

Licensed Clinical Pastoral Counselor

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