

January 24, 2023

The Honorable Representative Orrock
House Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee
Commonwealth of Virginia General Assembly
House Committee Room, Pocahontas Building
900 East Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

RE: HB 1433 - Interstate Licensed Professional Counselors Compact - Support

Chairperson Orrock, Vice-Chair Head, and honorable members of the House Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee:

On behalf of the American Counseling Association (ACA), I am writing to express our strong support for the Counseling Compact. Founded in 1952, ACA is the world's largest association exclusively representing 60,000 professional counselors in all fifty states including the Commonwealth of Virginia, the home of our national office.

The American Counseling Association is built on enduring values and a mission that promotes human dignity, diversity, respect, and the attainment of quality of life for all. Removing barriers to access critical life-saving services in a time of urgent need could not be more important to this mission. COVID-19 has exposed unacceptable health care disparities throughout our country, highlighting the critical need for services. The question we now face is how to promote accessibility of mental health services safely across the country. The Counseling Compact is the most viable way of achieving this goal.

Much like the existing licensure compacts for nurses, physical therapists, physicians, psychologists and EMS personnel, the Counseling Compact will increase licensure portability for practitioners while allowing member state regulatory boards to better protect consumers through enhanced sharing of licensure information. Existing interstate occupational licensure compacts have been successful in reducing barriers for practitioners who wish to provide services in other states.

The Counseling Compact will benefit clients and the counseling profession 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 maintain their certifications when relocating with greater ease.
- Preserving and strengthening the current system of state licensure.

According to the Department of Defense, military families move every three years on average. The Compact helps military spouses relocate and begin work without delay by reducing the time and effort needed to gain authorization to practice in a new state, even when compared to expedited licensure laws for military spouses. The Counseling Compact will support military families, improve access to and continuity of care and increase licensure portability for professional counselors while maintaining the current system of state licensure.

While providing these benefits to our members and the counseling community, the Counseling Compact also preserves the authority of each state to protect public health and safety through existing state regulatory structure. The Compact does not determine scope of practice or alter the state practice act in any way.

Unlike national licensure initiatives that supersede state regulatory authority, an interstate compact allows a member state to continue to determine the requirements for licensure in that state as well as maintain the state's unique scope of practice for all professional counselors practicing in that state, whether it be through a state-issued license or through a privilege to practice. Additionally, by ensuring the sharing of investigative and disciplinary information among member states, the Counseling Compact will allow member state regulatory boards to better protect the public.

With these benefits in mind, the American Counseling Association is excited to endorse the Counseling Compact and urges your support in the passage of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shawn Boynes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "B".

Shawn Boynes
CEO