

House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services
03/18/2022 Upon Adjournment
SB22-077 Interstate Licensed Professional Counselor Compact
Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Virginia Gebhart For Colorado Foundation for Universal Health Care	<p>The Colorado Foundation for Universal Health Care supports this bill because it will help ease the shortage of licensed professional counselors in all corners of the state. This will open up telehealth counseling for those who are desperate for behavioral health care and can't find any help now. Research shows that telehealth for behavioral health issues is just as effective as face to face counseling. This has been needed for years and the need is off the charts now.</p> <p>In my transplant parent support group, we discuss the need for behavioral health services for ourselves and for families who live in other states. Transplant programs here serve families in the Rocky Mountain region. When families go back home, they often have no access to counselors who understand the issues that transplant recipients and their families may face long after they have left the hospital.</p> <p>This is a quick way to increase services to underserved areas and communities. It will relieve suffering and save lives. Please pass this bill.</p>



Please Vote Yes on SB 22-077

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 077, concerning the adoption of an interstate compact to allow a person who is a licensed professional in the person's state of residence to practice professional counseling in a compact state in which the person is not licensed.

My name is Jane Johnston, the Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator, at The Arc of Colorado. The Arc of Colorado promotes and protects the human rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and actively promotes their full inclusion in the community throughout their lifetimes. With over 2,500 members, there are 14 local chapters of The Arc serving 9,500 people annually.

All people, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), should have timely access to high quality, comprehensive, accessible, affordable, appropriate behavioral health care that meets their individual needs, maximizes health, wellbeing, and function, and increases independence and community participation.

- The current mental health care system is fragmented and struggles to provide uniform access to a comprehensive array of health services and supports including behavioral and mental health counselors. This bill is one simple solution to expand the professional counseling workforce and thereby increase accessibility to critical behavioral health counseling.
- While many people encounter difficulty in finding affordable, high quality mental health care, people with IDD face additional barriers, sometimes life-threatening, when attempting to access timely, appropriate mental and behavioral health services in their communities. The issue is exasperated in our rural communities.
- People with IDD deserve access to counseling professionals who have received specialized training to understand and respond to their needs. This access should be provided in the community through clinical settings or through telehealth services. This is particularly pronounced in rural communities where telehealth tools must be utilized in innovative ways.
- People with IDD are more likely to live in poverty and cannot afford travel long distances. For cost containment purposes, many public and private health care plans limit access to specialists and critical services. It is important that services are available in a community (on the ground or through technology).

Vote YES!

SB 077 ensures that all people, including people with disabilities, will be afforded access to licensed professional counselors. This is a simple solution to ensure critical workforce expansion in the field of professional counseling to address the behavioral health crisis across the country and in Colorado. The Arc of Colorado strongly urges a yes vote on Senate Bill 077.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Jane Johnston, Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator, The Arc of Colorado



Please Support SB22-077 Licensed Professional Counselors Interstate Compact

Sponsors: Representatives Mary Young & Colin Larson, Senators Joann Ginal & Rob Woodward

Background:

Colorado already participates in numerous interstate licensure compacts for healthcare providers including nurses, physicians, psychologists, EMTs, physical therapists, occupational therapists, audiologists, and speech pathologists.

Licensure compacts generally help in expanding license portability and safely streamlining licensing burdens. This is particularly helpful in addressing the critical workforce shortages seen across the mental health professions at this time. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted significant structural deficits in our national mental health delivery system, including the need for expanded telehealth supports and ability for Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) to deliver services across state lines as patients travel, transition, and relocate.

SB22-077 proposes to create a new interstate licensure compact in Colorado for LPCs following the Council on State Governments (CSG) template – the same model used to enact licensing compacts for Colorado's other healthcare providers in recent years. The LPC interstate compact was finalized in late 2020 and was enacted in Georgia and Maryland in 2021, with more than a dozen additional states currently considering legislation. Once 10 states join the compact, it will become effective. Under the compact, counselors must abide by all the laws, rules, and scope of practice in the state in which they are practicing.

SB22-077 passed the Colorado Senate unanimously.

Compact Benefits:

- Increases access to care and care delivery options for patients.
- Streamlines licensing to expand workforce capacity to meet surge and emergency needs.
- Permits additional LPCs to provide services to underserved or geographically isolated populations through telehealth or in-person service delivery.
- Improves continuity of care when patients relocate or travel to other compact member states.
- Eliminates barriers to care for providers by reducing licensure burdens and improving portability to practice across state lines without needing full licenses (costs, paperwork, time) in each additional member state.
- Improves consumer protection across state lines by ensuring safe regulation through shared data and disciplinary systems.
- Early adoption ensures a model that serves the best interests of our state.

Supporters:

Colorado Counseling Association
Children's Hospital Colorado
Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council
Colorado Community Health Network
Colorado Hospital Association

Mental Health Colorado
NAMI Colorado (National Alliance on Mental
Illness)
National Association of Social Workers,
Colorado Chapter

Questions? Contact:

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