



## **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 for your consideration.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

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

