

SUPPORT - Testimony in favor of the amendments to HB 4071

Chair Nosse and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care:

My name is Dominique N. Marsalek, M.A. and I am testifying on behalf of the [American Counseling Association](https://www.counseling.org). Founded in 1952, ACA is the world's largest association exclusively **representing 60,000 professional counselors** in all fifty states including the state of Oregon.

I am testifying in support of the Counseling Compact amendment which will allow Oregon to join the 32 other states, including Washington State, which have enacted the Compact in the past three years as well as the 12 states which have introduced thus far this session.

The Counseling Compact utilizes a “mutual recognition” model of interstate practice, whereby Compact member states agree to “recognize” valid licenses issued by other member states. To utilize the Compact, a professional counselor must have a license in good standing in their home state—their primary state of residence—and the home state must be a member of the Compact. When a licensee wants to work in another member state, the licensee must obtain a “privilege to practice” from the Counseling Compact Commission, the public administrative entity composed of a state counseling board representative from each member state. Commission regulatory power is strictly confined to administration of the compact and does not interface or interfere in anyway with individual state practice acts or scope of practice.

A privilege to practice is simply an additional privilege that a Oregon counselor can opt into after being licensed by your state. The Compact is not an alternate license nor pathway to licensure. It is an optional privilege for current licensees in your state. The Counseling Compact preserves the authority of each state to protect public health and safety through the existing state regulatory structure unlike national licensure which supersedes state regulatory authority.

The Compact is revenue and cost neutral. We do not anticipate substantial additional costs for states because the Counseling Compact allows

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member states to offset nominal administrative costs by charging an appropriate fee for the privilege to practice. Fees will not be used for revenue but simply to offset administrative costs. These fees will substantially reduce the cost of practice across state lines for counselors.

Membership in the Counseling Compact:

- Improves patient access;
- Increases patient choice;
- Improves communication between states:
 - Through the interstate data system
 - By ensuring that all adverse actions are reported promptly;
 - And by facilitating the sharing of investigatory information between states.
- Improves continuity of care for residents and military families;
- Allows for interstate practice via telehealth;
- Simplifies and speeds up the current interstate licensure process from an arduous process sometimes spanning months and years to near instant verification for practice across state lines through the modernized data system.
- Creates a expedited licensure mechanism for counselors moving from one member state to another member state
- Requires continuing education for all who practice and
- Improves portability for military spouses.

Privilege to practice through the Compact will be available to counselors by early 2024 allowing for rapid verification and immediate access to all compact member states. This enhances the workforce, ensures Oregon remains competitive, meets increasing demand, broadens patient choice, and creates a national database and network for the first time allowing for advancements in behavioral health while optimizing patient safety.

The Compact is the only long-term sustainable solution to the issue of licensure portability, practice across state lines, and workforce shortages in behavioral health. On behalf of the American Counseling Association, I urge you to vote favorably on this Compact. Thank you for your time and consideration.