

Testimony in Favor of the -3 Amendments to HB 4071 (Counseling Compact) and Request for Addition to the -1 Amendments (Task Force on Health Professional Licensing Modernization)

To: Chair Nosse and Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care
Fr: Melissa Chernaik, MS, LPC
Date: February 11, 2024

As a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) practicing in Oregon, I am writing for two purposes related to Proposed Amendments to HB 4071:

1) I write to express strong support for enacting the Counseling Compact, as proposed in the -3 Amendments.

As you are well aware, our state and nation face both a behavioral health crisis and a devastating lack of access to mental health care. In response, professional counselors are advocating for an interstate counseling compact—a constitutionally authorized and legally binding contract between states, similar to those already in effect for Nurses, Physical Therapists, and Physicians.

Like other interstate compacts, the Counseling Compact is designed to improve access to care by reducing barriers to treatment for clients and barriers to practice for licensed professional counselors. The compact promotes cooperation among member, while preserving each state’s licensure requirements, scope of practice and regulatory authority. Per the most up-to-date [map](#), 32 states have already enacted legislation, with legislation pending in 11 more states and the District of Columbia.

I believe that enacting the Counseling Compact will benefit Oregon consumers, by increasing access to care, enhancing professional counselors’ mobility in this post-COVID era, and ensuring continuity of care when clients or counselors relocate or travel to other states. ***For these reasons, I urge adoption of the -3 Amendments.***

2) I write to express concern that neither Licensed Professional Counselors, nor Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, is represented in the -1 Amendments to HB 4071.

The -1 Amendments to HB 4071, establishing The Task Force on Professional Licensing Modernization, take an important step forward in updating the mission and practices of Oregon’s Health Professional Regulatory Boards. This process will no doubt improve collaboration, establish best practices, ensure more adequate resources and find creative solutions to challenges, e.g. swift licensing of new counselors to serve the tremendous need for mental health care.

It is therefore concerning to see that while -1s direct the appointment of doctors, social workers, dentists, nurses, and employers (counties, clinics, hospitals)—as well as representatives of their Boards—the task force as written excludes LPCs and LMFTs.

Professional Counselors and Therapists are a vital part of Oregon’s behavioral health care system, and represent a fast-growing sector of mental health professionals in Oregon. ***I respectfully ask that a representative of licensed professional counselors licensed under ORS 675.715 be added to the -1 Amendments.***

Thank you very much for all you do to support behavioral health access in Oregon, and for your consideration of these thoughts.