

Dear Chair Nosse and Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care,

My name is Elisabeth Herrera, LPC, NCC, and I am the President of the Coalition of Oregon Professional Associations for Counseling and Therapy (COPACT), an organization that works on behalf of all licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, registered associates and students in counseling and marriage and family therapy programs. We are a partner of the Oregon Counseling Association (ORCA). Our mission is to advance access to quality mental health care for all Oregonians. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 3351, which would allow Oregon to be the 37th state to join the Interstate Counseling Compact. As a mental health provider and advocate, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges posed by licensing barriers and access to care, and I believe this legislation is a crucial step toward addressing these issues.

The Counseling Compact offers significant advantages to both mental health professionals and the clients they serve. By reducing administrative burdens, it streamlines licensure while maintaining Oregon's high professional standards. Many mental health professionals face substantial difficulties when attempting to move or practice across state lines, leading to delays in care and exacerbating the ongoing workforce shortage. This compact would also allow providers to more effectively serve clients who relocate or require services across state borders.

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 its existing 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 determining the requirements for licensure in that state while maintaining the state's unique scope of practice for all professional counselors, whether through a state-issued license or a privilege to practice. Additionally, by ensuring the sharing of investigative and disciplinary information among member states, the Counseling Compact will allow regulatory boards to better protect the public.

As a mental health provider, I know firsthand the challenges of meeting growing demand while maintaining the highest professional standards. HB 3351 is a critical opportunity to expand access to care without compromising quality. I urge you to support this legislation to reinforce Oregon's mental health system and ensure more individuals receive the services they need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Herrera, LPC, NCC  
President, Coalition of Oregon Professional Associations for Counseling and  
Therapy (COPACT)