

## Written Testimony in Support of HB 3351: Enacting the Interstate Counseling Compact in Oregon

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

My name is Maria Bonacci, and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor practicing in Portland, OR. I am writing to express my support for House Bill 3351, which would allow Oregon to join the Interstate Counseling Compact.

As it is, many states reciprocate licensure when a counselor provides the proper documentation and fee. This serves as an unnecessary barrier that costs time and energy for counselors, supervisors, boards, and other administrative bodies.

The COVID pandemic has impacted the delivery of mental health services in innumerable ways. We have seen a tremendous increase in demand for services. The convenience of telehealth therapy cannot be overstated and an interstate compact allows for continuity of care across geographical distance.

An interstate compact allows clients and therapists to pursue educational and career goals, offer support and care in the event of a family emergency, and generally be able to move freely across state lines without concern for interruption in continuity of care.

By joining the Counseling Compact, Oregon can:

- **Expand Access to Care:** Allowing licensed counselors from other member states to practice in Oregon will increase the availability of mental health professionals, particularly in underserved and rural areas.
- **Support Military Families and Relocated Clients:** Military families and individuals who move frequently would benefit from continued access to their counselors without interruption.
- **Reduce Administrative Burdens:** The Compact will streamline the licensing process, saving time and financial resources for both practitioners and regulatory agencies.
- **Maintain High Professional Standards:** Participating states share disciplinary information to ensure the quality and safety of care provided across state lines.

## Why This Matters for My Clients

Many of my clients are queer and trans people who experience aggression in their daily lives and struggle to reach out for mental health support. When clients are forced to relocate for any number of reasons, it is difficult and painful for them to have to seek a new therapist, particularly one who has lived experience in queer and trans communities and who is a trauma treatment provider.

As a provider, I see HB 3351 as a crucial step toward expanding access to quality care while ensuring efficiency in serving more clients. I encourage you to support this bill to enhance Oregon's mental health system and make essential services more accessible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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