

Testimony Regarding HB 2288
March 20, 2023

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Shaughnessy. I am the Counseling board member for the Kansas Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board. I have been in private practice as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor for over 20 years. My purpose before you today is to share with you important details about the Interstate Counseling Compact that is contained in HB 2288.

Three years ago, when it became clear that the Counseling Compact had gained enough momentum to become a possibility in our country, the BSRB approached the idea of a compact with skepticism. Although there are many other compacts in our state that allow licensed professionals to benefit from interstate practice, such as nurses and physicians, there were many unanswered questions about the Counseling Compact. Questions about cost, control of the high standards that we hold for behavioral health in our state, and how to resolve disciplinary issues kept behavioral health leaders in Kansas from initially supporting the compact. As the compact developed, it became clear that these questions were being addressed by the Counseling Compact Commission. Our skepticism was slowly replaced by enthusiasm for how this compact will benefit the behavioral health community and the residents of Kansas. The list of benefits I present today highlight some key advantages for the state of Kansas.

The counseling compact provides a privilege to practice in member states. Kansas licensees keep their Kansas license, and designate Kansas as their home state. Counselors can choose to join the compact- it is a voluntary process. The fee structure is designed to compensate state governments for the extra processing of compact documents. It will not take away money from the revenue stream that currently exists for behavioral health in the state of Kansas. A national database will organize compact licensee information to ensure that home state licenses are current and free of any disciplinary action.

There have been numerous meetings in our state about the compact. We have spoken with behavioral health leaders, mental health agencies, associations, and individual practitioners to understand how the compact will impact the state of Kansas. As a result, the BSRB Board and our Counseling Advisory Committee have expressed direct support for the Compact and the passage of HB 2288, as it will provide the following benefits to the residents and counselors of Kansas.

-the Compact will increase the number of Licensed Counselors allowed to practice in our state, thus addressing the current mental health workforce shortage

-the resulting increase in professional counseling services across the state will enhance our ability to protect the public

-It will allow spouses of active military personnel to practice in our state with greater ease.

-It will allow for the use of telehealth technology, allowing more counselors to provide service in rural areas.

-It will eliminate the necessity for licenses in multiple states.

-the exchange of licensee investigative and disciplinary information will prevent licensees from practicing in a different by avoiding disciplinary action in their home state

Currently 17 states have adopted the counseling compact, with another 13 introducing legislation this year. Current research conducted by the Council of State Governments indicates that approximately 40 states plan to adopt the counseling compact all together.

With your support, I hope to see Kansas become a part of this Compact. Thank you for your consideration today.

Laura Shaughnessy