

Dear Esteemed Representatives:

I was fortunate to marry my husband at the end of his Navy career, so I was not subject to relocations every three years. We also met while he was stationed in Virginia Beach. With the greater Hampton Roads area home to sixteen military installations, civilian doctors not accepting Tricare was the minority, if they existed at all. Because my husband retired, we are fortunate to have Tricare and not rely on commercial coverage, but after my experience in Virginia, I didn't give a second thought to finding providers when we moved to Vermont. I realized how spoiled I was once I started searching. After spending my life in the suburbs, I was already adjusting to living in a rural area. Now I consider myself lucky if I can find a medical provider within an hour. Finding behavioral health practitioners is a beast of its own.

Tricare partners with Doctor on Demand and Telemynd, but those providers fill up weeks in advance and the Vermont offerings are slim. Over a year, I've only been able to connect with two practitioners, neither of whom was a good match, and it took about six weeks between when I identified them and when I completed my first appointment. I attempted to utilize the Tricare "find a provider" website and Psychology Today, reaching out to over three dozen clinicians, but very few offered virtual appointments, a necessity when you live in Highgate, or they were not accepting new patients. Like many others, I cannot afford to pay out of pocket. I've now been in Vermont for eighteen months and am still searching.

In addition to being a consumer of mental health services, I am currently licensed at the master's level in social work in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, and while under supervision I see clients in all three states. My specialties include perinatal and postpartum mood disorders, infertility, and military. I hope to pass the licensing exam this spring and want to be accessible to as many clients as possible.

A friend of mine based in Colorado, spent nearly \$1000 to obtain licensure in just three states. She works 40 hours per week and her schedule is packed. She'd love to expand to more places, but cannot afford to do so. Joining the social work compact would allow highly qualified practitioners from all over the country to provide desperately needed services to Vermonters. Expanding virtual access would also free up the availability of local providers whose services are critical to those who can only see providers in person.

Finding the right clinician is like finding the right shoe; if it's not a good fit, you aren't going to make it very far. I love living here, and just as you have with nursing, I implore you to join the Social Work Compact to provide Vermonters the opportunity to improve their mental health and overall quality of life in this great state.

Please vote to pass the Social Work Compact, bill H.510.

Respectfully,
Robyn Klein, LMSW, ACM-SW, SSW