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Dear Rep Houghton, Rep. Durfee, and Members of the House Committee on Health Care

I am testifying in support of H.62 *An act to the Interstate Counseling Compact.*

I am Jeri W Stevens PhD, LCPC, CCS. proudly born in Bennington, Vt., reside in Maine and currently am in Arizona on a 7 month RV trip.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you about the Counseling Compact. I come to you with 43+ years of experience in the mental health field as a practitioner and clinical supervisor, 15 yrs as educator at Husson University, former licensure board member in Maine, former chair of the AMHCA ethics committee, current AMHCA chair of the chapters leaders committee and sitting member on the AMHCA steering committee for the counseling compact as well as the ethics committee.

My testimony will focus more on the public need for and benefits of joining the Counseling Compact.

As a practicing licensed mental health counselor and supervisor (LCPC-Me) and national advocate for counseling, I have first-hand witnessed the tremendous transitions in the mental health field as social constructs have morphed. Several perfect storms have occurred, setting the stage for the compact need:

1. Deficit/Availability of health care professionals.

There is a need for more services. Waitlists for mental health services nationally is enormous, AND substance use addiction and suicide is at an all-time crisis.

The counseling compact will provide greater individual and family access to mental health services by licensed counselors. The compact will allow for consumers to remain intact with their clinician even when they move thus minimizing the waitlist.

2. Mobile society (clients and counselors)

Individuals (clients and counselors) are more mobile resulting in the need for flexibility in continuity of care. The counseling relationship and continuity of

care are fundamental to growth and change. People are traveling more, jobs are in transition, college students either go home or go to college and military families are in transition making continuity of care complicated.

The counseling compact will allow for client and counselor mobility. When people move to or travel through your state they can continue with their counselor as long as they are a member in the compact.

3. Technological advancements

Counseling care, until about 10 years ago, was assumed to be in person face to face however, with the growth and development of telehealth, it can no longer be assumed. Medical and mental health delivery is often done through modern technology. **COVID** showed us that we can work virtually. During the State of Emergencies, almost all agencies and private practitioners worked successfully through telehealth. Many consumers prefer telehealth and do not want to resume in person sessions.

The counseling compact will allow for modern technology to continue to advance and more consumers to seek support across state lines. With the development of more HIPAA compliant technology, there is more access to counseling. The compact will assure regulatory function.

4. Public safety

The primary responsibility to licensure boards is consumer and public safety. Every state has their own set of rules. There are no set standards that regulate mental health counselors as they attempt to provide quality care to a mobile society.

The counseling compact will assure public safety. If a clinician causes harm and they are member of the compact, they run the risk being barred from the compact and disciplined in their licensure state.

See the map <https://counselingcompact.org/map/>

Currently there are 17 states enacted and another 12/13 in legislation (Vt is now in)

So what is the counseling compact and how will it benefit VT?

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The CC allows counselors to use their counseling license granted by their home state to apply for the privilege to practice in other member states. This will allow VT licensed mental health counselors to apply to have the privilege to also work in other compact states like NH & Me.

Once Vt passes the compact and the commission has set the rules, individual counselor may apply. Counselors must have an unencumbered license, have taken a national exam, have completed a supervised professional experience, and have earned a 60 semester-hour master's degree.

The CC allows a clinician to practice where the client is and must abide by that states rules and regulations. If not, they run the risk of removal from CC privilege as well as the possibility of licensure board complaint in home state.

For more specific facts please review the Fact Sheet developed by the [Counseling Compact Org.](#)

The Counseling Compact commission is already underway with an anticipate delivery in early 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

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