

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Human Services
For HB 2557

Compiled on: Tuesday, April 4, 2023 9:18 PM

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Hearing Date: April 4, 2023 8:00 AM

Katherine Bacon, Dr.
self, professional counselor
Houston, TX

I support this bill; please vote favorably out of cmt; thank you

Keith Simonson
Military Officers Association of Am
Flower Mound, TX

I strongly support this bill that will increase access to mental health services and streamline the licensure process for military spouses who are professional counselors.

As of December 2022, 17 states have passed legislation to join the Licensed Professional Counselors compact. The Compact, a binding agreement among member states:

- expands the mobility of the counseling workforce, increases access to care
- enables counselors to serve clients who are increasingly engaged in multi-state employment and education
- facilitates efficient licensure processes for military-connected families
- ensures that proper regulatory processes necessary for the protection of the public are maintained and completed

The counseling compact is more important now than ever before!

The 2022 Mental Health America Report ranks Texas 50th among states in Mental Health Workforce Availability (830 individuals per Mental Health professional). Additionally, almost 16 million Texans live in Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. A lack of access to care and inadequate professional mental health workforce capacity directly impact Texas Veterans and their families. Of the 1.56 million Veterans who call Texas home, only 35% (roughly 545,205) are registered in the Veterans Health Administration system.

There is a need for counselors to have the privilege to practice in multiple states and Texas's citizens - especially those in military and Veteran communities will be well-served by HB 2557.

James CUNNINGHAM, Chairman

Alamo MOAA and TCVO

NEW BRAUNFELS, TX

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Elizabeth Wong

Self, Licensed Professional Counselor

Austin, TX

Allowing Professional Counselors to join the Counseling Compact would improve Texans' access to mental health care by increasing the number of counselors available to Texans throughout the state. This would in turn help improve the well-being of Texans by providing support that helps Texans live healthier and more productive lives. Joining the Counseling Compact would also provide better support for military families who move state to state, as they would be able to keep their same provider as long as they live in a state covered by the compact. Similarly, families experiencing divorce or separation can also continue to use their same provider if part of the family moves to a different state. This continuity in care is essential as establishing trust and a working professional relationship with a counselor takes time and can be easily disrupted if the client moves out of state, which currently prevents the Texas counselor from continuing treatment. More than 180 of the 254 counties in Texas are identified as mental health workforce shortage areas. Joining the counseling compact would help address this by increasing the number of counselors who can provide mental health care in the state. This is especially important for rural counties as they are often isolated and miles away from health care centers. However, through the counseling compact and telehealth services, more Texans in rural areas will be able to access mental health care as they need it. Thank you.

Brooke Bordic

Clinical Mental Health Counseling Intern at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor / CSI Mu Eta Beta chapter Student Representative

Cedar Park, TX

Having the beneficial increase in reciprocity of mental health providers with the Counseling Compact should come with greater responsibility. It is therefore even more important to continue ensuring that mental health providers have completed the proper educational experiences and requirements, such as passing the national counselor exam and obtaining a master's degree in counseling, to safeguard from an increased risk of harm to members of the US population.

Wendy Killam, Dr

Self. LPC in Texas

Lufkin, TX

This bill needs to be passed as is and would allow for greater portability of license for LPCs

Swathi Muppa, LPC

Self

San Antonio, TX

My name is Swathi Muppa, and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor (#76019) in the State of Texas. I am writing you today to implore you to consider passing licensure portability and the counselor compact. Licensure portability for mental health counselors has been in the works since 2017, but there has been a lack in movement over the years.

Licensure portability, or the Counselor Compact, is supported by the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors. The Texas Counseling Association also endorses this legislation. Licensure portability allows already licensed counselors within Texas who move out of state to practice without having to endure another tedious and lengthy licensure process. It also allows counselors who move to Texas and are fully licensed in another state to practice without reapplying for licensure. To be clear, licensure portability would not be handed over easily and there are gatekeeping practices in place for this proposed reciprocity. A few examples of the gatekeeping are the stipulations that only counselors who are fully licensed and without any disciplinary actions would be eligible to apply.

The landscape of Texas is changing, and this inevitably has led to an influx of community members from other states. This national standard of licensure portability allows for an increased number of licensed counselors and in turn, increasing access to mental health care.

To conclude my request in this matter, I would like reiterate that there are strict guidelines in place for licensure portability and there is an increased need for mental health care in an ever-growing state. This benefits both incoming counselors from other states and the population in general who would have more counselors to access for mental health care.

Heather Trepal

Self

San Antonio, TX

I write to express my support for the Counseling Compact while also recommending future legislation that would protect Professional Counselor Identity by requiring a master's degree in counseling, and requiring that licensure applicants pass a counseling exam.

Douglas Brpown

Self - retired

Flower Mound, TX

I am very much in favor of this bill that will increase access to mental health services for professional counselors and increase the licensure procedures.

Clarene Schroeder Brown, Mrs

Self - retired

Flower Mound, TX

I strongly favor this bill as it permits licensure among many states of professional counselors and increases access to mental health services.

Amber Quaranta-Leech, Mrs.

Self, Licensed Professional Counselor and Supervisor

Tyler, TX

I support the counselor compact. However, the qualifications for those accepted by the compact need to uphold the profession and included a Master's degree in a Counseling field, graduation from a CACREP accredited university, the passing of a counseling exams such as the NCE or NCMHCE, and for continuing education requirements to be met that meets or exceeds the current expectations for Licensed Professional Counselors in the state of Texas. While I support the portability of licensure, there needs to be a continued standard of initial and continuing education which maintains the high standard currently upheld.

Amy Afflerbach
self, counseling student
Kyle, TX

As a counseling student who is getting ready to graduate this year, I have been watching and hoping this bill goes through with bated breath for some time. This bill passing means as my aging mother who lives in West Virginia needs assistance, I can move to her state to help care for her without having to go back to graduate school and jump through hoops to become licensed in that state. This bill passing means counseling can be more widely available in rural areas that are in desperate need of qualified professionals. This bill passing means if a client needs to move out of state, they don't need to go and find a new counselor and completely start over; they can continue their healing journey with the person they've already chosen to work with. And this bill will make the lives of counselors easier, which in this profession at this time where we have a shortage of mental health professionals and a high demand for services, is crucial. I sincerely hope you listen to us in the mental health field and vote to not only help the lives of us, but the lives of your family member and friends who are receiving counseling services and so desperately need them.

Jennifer Jablonski
Self
Jonestown, TX

In favor. This will improve access to mental health and allow more clients to continued care if they or their counselor moves to another state under the compact.

Grace Lawrie
Self
Austin, TX

As a counseling graduate student at Texas State university, I would like to have it known that the interstate counseling compact will change the lives of countless Texans. It will mean the ability to access potentially life saving mental health services not otherwise available in the state. The passage of this bill will also result in Texan counselors' ability to make a more robust living while supporting the mental health of Americans elsewhere. With the ease of licensure portability, graduate programs such as my own at Texas State will surely see an uptick in applicants. Currently the difficulty in license portability can mean months of moving delays, and gaps in employment. This would simplify the lives of much needed mental health professionals while making it easier for the public to access these services. Please vote yes on hb2557

Madison Goodin
counseling student in training, self
Cedar Park, TX

I am writing to endorse the idea of having this bill be voted out of the committee because of the importance of approving this bill so that future counselors like myself will be able to serve the people of America with mental health issues and other related issues discussed in the counseling setting.

Alexandra Goodrich
Texas State University
Austin, TX

Please support this bill! As a masters student of professional counseling, license portability is very important to me as I begin my career as a therapist. I want to be able to serve as many people as possible, and as a native Texan it would be an honor to see Texas become one of the first states to join the counseling compact.

Paige Loria
Self- professional counselor
Round Rock, TX

HB 2557 is a bill that will help improve access to mental health care across states and eliminate barriers of access to affordable care. My comments today are to encourage the support for and passing of this bill.

Kaylyn Adams
Respark Therapy
San Marcos, TX

As an LPC this would allow therapists to reach clients of all rural areas across the United States. To those who are in critical need of mental health services and cannot access their rightful resources. Please consider how beneficial this would be not only for Texans, but for also persons nationwide. Everyone deserves mental health counseling.

Eric Kunish, Chair
National Alliance on Mental Illness-Central Texas Affiliate
Austin, TX

I support this bill!

Allison Greer Francis
The Center for Health Care Services
San Antonio, TX

My name is Allison Greer Francis and I am in favor of HB 2557. The state of Texas is facing a severe shortage of behavioral health workforce members, especially licensed professional counselors, and this bill would grant compact privileges to LPCs and other potential licensees that would be coming to Texas. We must do everything we can to expand the pipeline of behavioral health workers in Texas.

Sydney Carter
Network of Behavioral Health Providers
Houston, TX

NBHP supports this bill.