

S.B. 2: Regards criminal case competency and enters Ohio into PSYPACT

Dr. Mark Babula

March 11, 2021

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member LeLand, and members of The Ohio House of Representatives Criminal Justice Committee:

I am a psychologist in Toledo, and a Member of the Communications and Technology Committee of the Ohio Psychological Association.

I am writing to ask you to support SB 2. As a member of the Ohio Psychological Association's Communications and Technology Committee, I have been following the development and progress of PSYPACT for several years. I believe this bill will help to address unmet needs and help the citizens of Ohio better adapt to changing technology. By joining PSYPACT, Ohio would become a voting member of the commission that would allow us to help direct PSYPACT in the future.

Because I live close to the Michigan border, I chose to obtain licensure in both states. This allowed me to successfully continue treatment, through telepsychology, with a client who spends significant amounts of time in Michigan for work. I have also been able to use telepsychology with a student attending college in Ohio. I have had other clients, however, who moved out of state for work or school, and I have not been able to continue their treatment. Some clients may be able to begin treatment with a new psychologist. This can be difficult, however, for college students or people who commute for work, who spend time in various locations; it can be easier and more productive to have one consistent treatment provider. It can also be helpful for those relocating more permanently to be able to continue with a therapist through the transition, and potentially to continue treatment with the person from whom they have already been receiving treatment, rather than restarting with a new therapist.

Senate Bill 2 also creates opportunities for people with mobility issues, people in rural communities, and others who may have limited access to psychological treatment. It expands opportunities for clients with religious beliefs, cultural concerns, language barriers, or specialized mental health treatment needs to find

a psychologist to meet their specific needs. It also could create increased opportunities for people with time constraints, either related to the time needed to travel to a psychologist's office or lack of availability during normal business hours in their time zone, to be connected with a psychologist able to match their availability. The current pandemic has highlighted the need for and benefits of remote services, and PSYPACT maximizes that potential. It includes protection such as requiring a doctoral degree, addressing discipline, and requiring ongoing training.

I see few risks or concerns with this compact, but I am aware of problems that could be remedied by it. I am aware of clients seeking services but struggling to find appropriate services because of their location. I also know of clients experiencing problems after moving out of state, being unable to continue the previously established therapy. I know a therapist who was not a psychologist, but who can serve as an example. When one of her clients moved out of state, both agreed it was best to continue treatment, which they chose to do by phone. The therapist was not aware this was not allowed until I brought it up. The therapist expressed her belief that continuing treatment during and after the move was in the best interest of the client, which I generally agree with, but there was no realistic mechanism in place for that. I have heard from local psychologists, as well as spoken with my own clients about the struggle to maintain services while the clients travel. Senate Bill 2, or PSYPACT, helps to prevent or remedy situations like these for psychologists. It creates a structured and legal means to continue the treatment in a way that also protects the client.

I am aware that, to practice telepsychology under PSYPACT, I need to maintain my licensure, obtain an E.Passport, and demonstrate continuing education relevant to using technology in psychology. I am aware disciplinary information will be shared on a common database between PSYPACT states. I know and welcome these, as I believe this compact would benefit psychologists and clients.

I believe passing this bill will benefit the people of Ohio. I ask you again for your support, and thank you for your time and consideration.

Mark Babula, Psy.D.