

S.B. 258 PSYPACT Testimony

Dr. Mark Babula

March 4th 2020

Chairman Lipps, Co-Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Boyd, members of the Ohio House Health Committee, my name is Mark Babula and I am a psychologist in Toledo, Ohio, and a member of the Ohio Psychological Association Communications and Technology Committee. I am here today to ask you to support SB 258 allowing Ohio to join PSYPACT.

As a member of the OPA 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 access services and adapt our practice through technology.

As a Toledo area psychologist I live close to the Michigan border. Since I have clients in both states, I chose to obtain licensure in both localities. This allowed me to successfully continue treatment, through telepsychology, with clients who live, work or attend school in either Ohio or Michigan. However, I have had other clients who moved out of state and I have not been able to continue their treatment. Although they may be able to begin treatment with a new psychologist, changing providers is difficult. It can prolong treatment increasing time and costs, or lead to more adverse outcomes by increasing the number of clients dropping out of treatment. For these reasons, it is generally easier and more productive to have one consistent treatment provider. In addition, college students, traveling professionals, families needing to relocate, and children of divorce with parents in more than one state, can all benefit from having ongoing access to their provider through significant life transitions.

Senate Bill 258 also creates opportunities for people with physical mobility issues, people in rural communities, and others who may have limited access to psychological treatment. It expands opportunities for clients to access providers with specific religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds, or for those with language barriers or who are seeking psychologists that provide specialized mental health treatments. It also could create increased opportunities for people with time

constraints. PSYPACT can eliminate the travel time needed for those in rural communities. It also can increase access for those with limited time during normal business hours. By opening up services in other time zones, PSYPACT increases their ability to connect with a Psychologist whose schedule matches their availability. The current pandemic has highlighted the need for and benefits of remote services, and PSYPACT maximizes that potential.

PSYPACT maintains Ohio's high standards for psychologists. All psychologists participating are required to have a doctoral degree, and abide by regulations in both their state of licensure and place of service delivery. It addresses discipline issues and maintains Ohio's ability to regulate who practices in our state. Further, by joining PSYPACT, Ohio would become a voting member of the commission that would allow us to help direct PSYPACT in the future.

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 from another field 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. Senate Bill 258, or PSYPACT, helps to prevent situations like this 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 have a doctorate degree, 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 requirements, 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, thank you for your time, and am open to any questions.

Mark Babula, Psy.D.