

March 9, 2021

Chairwoman Carruthers, Vice Chair Pavliga, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Ohio House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 204.

UC Health is an integrated academic health system serving the Greater Cincinnati region. In partnership with the University of Cincinnati, UC Health combines clinical expertise and compassion with research and teaching – offering patients options for even the most complex situations. The UC Health Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience is nationally recognized as a leader in advancing the diagnosis and treatment of behavioral disorders. UC Health Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience provides psychotherapy services to adults, adolescents, children, couples and families who are experiencing emotional difficulties due to stress, behavioral problems, grief or a variety of other life events. We provide evaluation and diagnosis for each patient, along with treatment that can include psychological testing, psychotherapy, psychopharmacology management and other various treatment options based on each individual's unique situation. Consistent with the mission of UC Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience, clinical services, research, education, and training are integral parts of this clinic.

SB 204 would allow Ohio licensed professional counselors to obtain an interstate license by removing administrative barriers that currently impede out-of-state counselors from caring for Ohioans, while still ensuring safety for our patients through the multistate license application and approval process. The purpose of the compact would be to facilitate interstate practice of Licensed Professional Counselors with the goal of improving public access to professional counseling services. Removing barriers to access for critical life-saving services in a time of urgent need could not be more important. COVID-19 has exposed unacceptable health care disparities throughout our country, highlighting the critical need for services. The question we now face is how to promote accessibility of mental health services safely across the country. SB 204 is a viable way of achieving this goal for our licensed professional counselors.

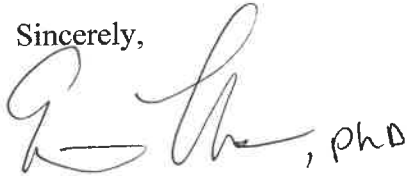
Additionally, SB 204 would greatly expand mental health care access to our patients by permitting UC Health licensed professional counselors to treat out-of-state patients via telehealth. Given our hospital's location, UC Health serves many patients who reside outside Ohio. If SB 204 is enacted, our licensed professional counselors could provide these clinical services to patients, greatly increasing mental health care access by eliminating administrative & logistical barriers. Telehealth provides convenient, highly accessible treatment that is delivered directly to communities most in need. Access to evidenced-based psychotherapy can be difficult due to barriers such as lack of transportation, patient schedule or medical barriers, and other financial stressors that prevent individuals from being able to consistently have psychotherapy appointments.

SB 204 also would increase licensure portability for clinicians while allowing member state regulatory boards to better protect consumers through enhanced sharing of licensure information. Existing interstate occupational licensure compacts have been successful in reducing barriers for practitioners who wish to provide services in other states. Unlike national licensure initiatives that

supersede state regulatory authority, an interstate compact allows a member state to continue to determine the requirements for licensure in that state, as well as maintain the state's unique scope of practice for all professional counselors practicing in that state, whether it be through a state-issued license or through a privilege to practice. Additionally, by ensuring the sharing of investigative and disciplinary information among member states, the Counseling Compact will allow member state regulatory boards to better protect the public.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 204. Please contact me at any time if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Erin Thase, PhD".

Erin Thase, PhD

Director of Behavioral Health

Assistant Professor

Licensed Psychologist

Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience

UC Health-University of Cincinnati Physicians