



Good morning. I am Dr. Thomas Cooper, President of the Maine Psychological Association. I would like to thank Chairperson Sanborn and Chairperson Tepler, as well as the committee members for the opportunity to discuss the Psychology Inter-Jurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT) initiative with you. I would also like to thank Chairperson Tepler for studying this issue and working to sponsor the legislation.

As you are all well aware, we are experiencing unprecedented demands on our healthcare system. While we continue to make remarkable strides in combatting COVID-19, the psychological consequences of the pandemic will last long beyond when we have “opened up.” The American Psychological Association warns of long-standing behavioral health and substance abuse crises and has been advocating for psychologists to evolve the way evidence-based treatment is provided. PSYPACT, is an example of such evolution. PSYPACT is an interstate compact which provides a mechanism for the ethical and legal practice of telehealth across state lines. As both the President of the Maine Psychological Association and a psychologist in private practice, I strongly support the passage of this legislation.

The practice of psychology is uniquely suited to telehealth services as our interventions are accessible to most without requiring specialized equipment. Changes during the pandemic - such as allowing for audio-only calls and mandated insurance coverage - have further removed obstacles to treatment. Long-standing research as well as current anecdotal evidence from both Maine psychologists and providers across the country have clearly shown that, for most populations, telehealth is just as effective as delivering services in-person.

In fact, I have found certain advantages to telehealth services. Over the course of the pandemic, many of my clients have moved or traveled out of state for various reasons. Some states created easily accessible temporary licensing laws that allowed therapy to continue. Other states did not enact such laws and treatment was terminated. In a number of instances, my clients indicated that they would have kept meeting with me but were unlikely to prioritize finding a new provider as they settled into their new state. This lapse in coverage obviously has significant implications for maintaining the wellbeing, health, and safety of many Americans.

As president of MePA, I can speak for a number of Maine psychologist and say that PSYPACT enhances our profession by eliminating many barriers to practice. As more and more states continue to adopt PSYPACT, it is easier for out-of-state providers to relocate to Maine while maintaining their practice. Allowing specialists the opportunity to move to Maine without surrendering their current practice can help us attract more highly qualified professionals to the state. MePA is regularly contacted by psychologists who have had to postpone or cancel plans to move to Maine because of difficulties with licensure. Increased access to inter-jurisdictional practice will significantly alleviate this bottleneck.

Finally, and most importantly, enacting PSYPACT has dramatic benefits for the people of Maine. The increased demand for services during the pandemic has highlighted the extent to which there are not



enough psychologists in the state to meet the needs of many Mainers. Currently, most of my peers have long waitlists and I continue to field calls from hospitals, schools, and primary care settings that are unable to find behavioral health providers for those in need. Access to out-of-state providers will help reduce the burden on Maine psychologists. Additionally, PSYPACT will allow at-risk Mainers, such as those with Opioid Use Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as children and Veterans, greater access to out-of-state specialists.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have and want to thank you again for considering this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Thomas Cooper, Psy.D.
President
Maine Psychological Association