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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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**The Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**  
**SB 139 Interstate Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact**  
**Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza**

Thank you Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to respectfully ask for your support of Senate Bill 139- Interstate Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact. This bill establishes an interstate licensure compact for occupational therapists. This means that occupational therapists can work across state lines, just as long as they are licensed by a member state of the compact. The Maryland General Assembly already has enacted similar legislation for nurses, physicians, and physical therapists.

This bipartisan legislation is a high priority as so many of us regularly hear from providers and constituents in our districts of the need for greater access to health care services. Occupational therapy services are particularly important as these services allow some of our most vulnerable constituents to live more independently. We need to ensure that older adults, children with special needs, and individuals recovering from injuries have the services they need to live as fully as possible.

As I worked with health care providers during COVID-19 during the interim, it was brought to my attention by members of the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association that this interstate occupational therapy licensure compact would have a direct benefit in increasing access to care, especially in districts like mine which are bordered by states, Delaware to the north, and Virginia to the south. Occupational therapists are critical health care providers. They help people maintain as much independence as possible, including older adults in long-term care facilities, people living with injuries to adapt to living at home, and students with disabilities to be productive in school.

Many of our districts are hard hit by health care workforce shortages, especially in the rural parts of the state. Our hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities, and community providers need more flexibility in recruiting qualified health care providers to provide both in-person and telehealth services.

Licensure compacts offer an important pathway to ensuring our health care facilities and providers have a sufficient number of qualified providers, making it easier for licensed health care practitioners from neighboring states to work in our hospitals and programs in our communities. The Compact also would support military spouses. Those military spouses who are health care practitioners would not have the burden of obtaining a new license every time they move to a different state.

This bill continues our committee's important work on telehealth. I supported and appreciated having the opportunity to work with Vice Chair Kagan on her emergency telehealth bill – Senate Bill 402 Health Care Practitioners – Telehealth and Shortage, which was one of the few bills that was signed into law by Governor Hogan, rather than just allowing it to go into effect. During the deliberations of the telehealth bill, Senator Kagan encouraged me to work on an amendment that underscored the importance of interstate compacts.

Specifically, the amendment included legislative intent that the Governor “facilitate the joining of the State with adjacent states and jurisdictions in interstate compacts regulating health care practitioners to improve patient access to health care practitioners in state communities experiencing a health care practitioner shortage.” This amendment laid the groundwork for the introduction of this Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact bill before you today.

Telehealth is an incredible innovation, and it has helped us ensure access to health care during the pandemic. In looking to the future, we need to create an avenue for telehealth providers to “cross State lines” and provide services virtually.

I am pleased to report that there is broad support for the bill with the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association, the Board of Occupational Therapy Practice, and the Maryland Hospital Association.

My panel today will explain a little more background about the development of the compact and how this compact will support access in all of our communities. I will just mention that I have also included a set of amendments in my testimony package. These amendments are entirely technical, as compact laws need to be consistent across states.

I respectfully ask my colleagues on the Senate Educational, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for a favorable report of Senate Bill 139.

Thank you for your kind consideration.