You have arrived at your virtual legislative visit – What do you talk about?

**Telehealth – HB 122**

The Ohio Counseling Association supports House Bill 122 (Sponsors Reps. Mark Fraizer and Adam Holmes), which would require private insurers to cover telehealth services by professional clinical counselors, among other health professionals. Although Ohio adopted rules prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic last year to require telehealth coverage for these services, the statutory certainty provided by HB 122 is important to ensure continued access to essential remote care. HB 122 has been voted out of the House Insurance Committee and is awaiting a vote on the House floor.

***Advocacy Talking Points***

* The pandemic has caused the need for mental health services to escalate – counselors are seeing more and more patients with anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, addiction and other diagnoses.
* Telehealth is a critical way for patients with barriers to transportation, physical limitations or who otherwise have restricted access to care to get the treatment they need.
* Counselors can accommodate and care for a larger population of patients in need through telehealth. The increased access and efficiency it provides benefits patients, and high standards of care remain uncompromised.

***LEGISLATOR ASK***: Please support the passage of HB 122.

**Oppose Universal Licensing – SB 131 and HB 203**

OCA opposes the broad-brush approach that SB 131 (Sponsors Sens. Kristina Roegner and Rob McColley) and HB 203 (Sponsor Rep. Jena Powell) take to licensing counselors and other professionals in Ohio. Universal licensing bills have been reintroduced again this General Assembly to allow professionals licensed in another state with recent experience working in that profession to be granted licensure in Ohio with little additional qualifiers or oversight. Neither bill has received a hearing yet, but last General Assembly the Senate version of the bill passed out of committee and was supported by several senators.

***Advocacy Talking Points***

* Universal licensing bills are a broad-brush approach to what should be a thoughtful and careful licensing process.
* Ohio has strong, rigorous standards of counselor licensure. Universal licensing threatens to lower those standards and allow counselors uninformed on Ohio’s laws and rules to treat patients in our state.
* Professional clinical counselors in Ohio are allowed to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders, but few other states allow that scope of practice. Although SB 131’s language does prohibit a licensee from practicing in a way that exceeds their training, there is no reliable way to enforce this under the bill.
* Universal licensing gives a leg up to out-of-state residents over hardworking Ohio professionals and disincentivizes people from moving to our state and becoming part of our workforce and tax base.

***LEGISLATOR ASK***: Please oppose universal licensing legislation in Ohio, SB 131 and HB 203.

**Conversion Therapy Ban – SB 50**

SB 50 (Sponsors Sens. Nickie Antonio and Tina Maharath) bans healthcare providers from engaging in conversion therapy, used to change a client’s sexual orientation, when treating minor patients and requires boards to suspend or revoke licenses for violations. The bill has not yet had a hearing. Currently, counselors in Ohio can be disciplined by the CSWMFT Board for engaging in conversion therapy and OCA has a strong, longstanding position in opposition to the practice.

***Advocacy Talking Points***

* Professional counselors in Ohio are bound by their code of ethics to do no harm, to promote client welfare and to respect their clients’ dignity. Conversion therapy violates this code and has been proven to harm patients by causing depression, shame, self-hatred, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and social withdrawal.
* Conversion therapy is not a proven or endorsed treatment modality - the DSM does not consider homosexuality a mental disorder in need of treatment and there is no scientific evidence that conversion therapy is effective in changing sexual orientation or attraction. The American Counseling Association, The American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association have all denounced conversion therapy.
* The Ohio CSWMFT Board can discipline licensees for engaging in conversion therapy because it is harmful and unproven. SB 50 would align statute with existing Board policy and strengthen the protections for patients who may be subjected to this harmful practice.

***LEGISLATOR ASK:*** Please support a ban on conversion therapy for minors, SB 50.