



# Advocacy in Action

## A NEWSLETTER OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNSELING ASSOCIATION'S GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE

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### IN THIS ISSUE:

- [Interstate Counseling Compact](#) Update. Will Pennsylvania join the more than 15 states that have enacted Compact legislation? The ACA has been working hard to bring the interstate compact to professional counselors. It may go into effect as soon as 2023! [Learn](#) about the Compact and how you can get involved.
- LEGISLATIVE UPDATES:
  - [Conversion Therapy](#). Did you know that conversion therapy is still legal in Pennsylvania? Legislation to ban this harmful process has been stalled since March of 2021. Learn how you can [make a difference](#).
  - [Student Loan Forgiveness](#). Getting paid for internships would be a game changer in the mental health field. Legislators see the need for more mental health professionals and have proposed to study the impact of paying for internships. Would it make your life easier? Do you support this idea? [Read more about it!](#)
- [LETTER FROM THE CHAIR](#). Travis Schermer is Chair of PCA's Government Relations Committee. He's also a professor at Carlow University. And he's a pretty cool guy. Read his [welcome letter here](#).
- [LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY DAY 2022](#). We had a good turnout and interesting conversation at PCA's 4th Annual Legislative Advocacy Day. We talked about the Counseling Compact and had small group discussions about issues in the field. Did you miss it? You won't want to miss next year's, so [stay tuned!](#)
- [GRC COMMITTEE MEMBERS](#). [Meet](#) Travis, Maddie, Scott, Sarah, and Pat. Read a little about what we are up to, and maybe you, too, will get inspired to get involved with our committee. We'd love to [hear from you!](#)





# Counseling Compact Update

Pennsylvania's counselors may soon have the opportunity to expand their practicing privileges into other states. So far, more than 15 states have signed the Counseling Compact into law. This fall, members of participating states will meet to codify the rules of the compact. The Compact may go into effect as soon as early 2023. Pennsylvania has not yet signed on, pending details of FBI background check procedures.

## What is the Counseling Compact?

- Counselors practicing in member states of the compact will have the ability to apply for interstate practicing privileges in other member states.
- You must have an active, unencumbered licenses in their practicing state,
- You will be able to conduct both telehealth and in-person sessions across state lines in other compact states.
- States would still retain the right to regulate counselor practice.
- Compact states must meet baseline licensing criteria to ensure professional integrity.

## Impacts:

- Many rural communities are chronically underserved, and physical distance to a counselor can prevent care from occurring.
- Families of military members that consistently need to travel can see their ability to receive care drastically cut.
- The compact for psychologists (PSYPACT) went into effect in 2018; the NASW is working on their interstate compact.

Simply put, this proposed legislation will allow more people to have increased access to mental health services.

## How you can help:

We are eager to hear from Pennsylvania counselors regarding your interest in this initiative and how it may impact your practice. [Reach out to the PCA GRC](#) with your input.

If you want to support this legislation, reach out to your [State Senator](#) and [State Representative](#).

# Proposal to Ban Conversion Therapy in PA

Two bills introduced in the PA legislature seek to ban use of conversion therapy with minors in Pennsylvania. This would bring PA in line with professional standards. The Pennsylvania Counseling Association supports this legislation.

The American Counseling Association (ACA) has a clear [position on conversion therapy](#):

“Conversion or reparative therapy is the discredited practice of using ‘therapy’ to attempt to change someone’s sexual orientation. The American Counseling Association opposes conversion therapy because it does not work, can cause harm, and violates our Code of Ethics. It is an attempt to treat something that is not a mental illness.”

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

### What you need to know:

- The ACA, American Psychological Association (APA), American Psychiatric Association (APA), National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and multiple other professional organizations oppose the use of conversion therapy.
- The use of conversion therapy has been banned by 18 states and Washington, DC.
- Pennsylvania currently allows the use of conversion therapy.
- House Bill 729, proposed by Representatives Brian Sims and Jessica Benham, and Senate Bill 26, proposed by Senator Anthony Williams, seek to ban use of conversion therapy with minors in Pennsylvania.
- This step would move Pennsylvania more in line with the ACA position on conversion therapy and would protect children in Pennsylvania.
- These bills have been sitting in committee since March 2021.

### How you can help:

Counselors in PA are encouraged to contact their state legislators to support adoption of these bills. You can find your State Senators [here](#), and State Representatives [here](#).

For assistance with advocacy and a template letter, please see ACA's [advocacy toolkit](#).



# Loan Forgiveness Bill for Mental Health Providers

Two bills are making their way through Harrisburg which aim to recruit more people into the mental health services professions by offering student loan forgiveness. This could be a game-changer for people in our field!

Want to support these bills? We encourage you to call your State Representative and your State Senator, and ask them to support these bills (HB 2384 and SB 94).

You can also send a letter or email. [Click here](#) for a sample letter.

## What you need to know:

The proposed acts are intended to address staff shortages in mental health, intellectual disabilities, and substance use disorder treatment by enticing people through “payment of a portion of student loans” if they join the profession. The House bill (HB 2384) addresses providers of mental health and intellectual disabilities services, and the Senate bill (SB 94) addresses substance use disorder treatment providers.

For providers to qualify for loan repayment, they would have to:

- be a resident of the Commonwealth,
- possess a two-year, four-year, or graduate degree from an accredited school,
- be hired full time by a county agency or an agency that provides services for a county,
- complete six months of employment and stay in good standing with that agency,
- perform staff duties at that agency,
- have an outstanding balance on their student loans, and
- agree to work in the field for at least four years.

## Want to help make this a reality?

Call your legislators:

- To support the House bill, contact your [State Representative](#).
- To support the Senate bill, contact your [State Senator](#).

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Send a letter or email:

- Click [here](#) for a template letter which you can amend and send to your Senator or Representative.



# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

My name is Travis Schermer and I chair the Government Relations Committee (GRC) for the Pennsylvania Counseling Association (PCA). It is an honor to serve in this role and to build on the committee's successes. From Dr. David Hall who led this committee during the establishment of the LPC in 1998 to Dr. Nellie Scanlon who championed the addition of "diagnosis" in 2018, this history of vision, strength, and unwavering belief in the integrity of the counseling profession inspires me to this day.

As the GRC grows, so do the challenges and opportunities for our profession. These include increased access to services, telehealth, interstate compacts, parity, and issues of social justice. The GRC supports PA counselors by tracking legislation, contacting legislators, and communicating with stakeholders regarding these issues. We also maintain contact with American Counseling Association staff to ensure a confluence between state and national efforts. While we are proud of the work we are doing, we need all PA counselors' support.

We must unite our profession through PCA in order to elevate the profile of LPCs in our state. Being able to introduce, support, and amend legislation is connected to the power of our collective voice. It is through PCA that we can share a united message, which becomes stronger when it represents all LPCs in the Commonwealth. For this reason, I encourage you to discuss the importance of membership in PCA with your colleagues, supervisees, and students.

This issue of Advocacy in Action is the first of what will be a bi-annual newsletter from the Government Relations Committee. It is intended to do the following for PCA membership: (a) promote awareness of counseling-related legislation; (b) increase visibility and accessibility of advocacy efforts; and (c) unite LPCs around shared professional concerns and interests.

On behalf of the GRC, we hope you will join us in promoting the counseling profession in PA and beyond. We look forward to working with you more closely in the future.

Be well,  
Travis Schermer, LPC  
PCA Government Relations Chair



## REACH OUT TO THE PCA GRC!

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# MEET THE PCA GRC!

Reach out to your committee members to get involved and provide input!

[Visit the PCA GRC webpage](#) for additional information.



Travis Schermer, PhD (he/him) | [twschermer@carlow.edu](mailto:twschermer@carlow.edu)  
Travis works as a counselor educator at Carlow University and a professional counselor at the Center for Counseling Arts. He is a proud PCA member and serves as the current chair for the PCA GRC.



Maddie Stevens, PhD (she/her) | [stevensm5@duq.edu](mailto:stevensm5@duq.edu)  
Maddie is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Duquesne University and also works as a counselor in a private practice. She has extensive experience in government relations and professional advocacy and is eager to support PA counselors in their legislative advocacy efforts. She currently serves as editor the the Advocacy in Action newsletter.



Scott Baker, PhD, LPC (he/him) | [sbaker@cccmer.org](mailto:sbaker@cccmer.org)  
Scott is a licensed counselor in three states, and he has provided a wide range of counseling services. His work experience includes crisis and disaster response, addictions counseling, mental health counseling with children and adults, custody evaluation, psychological evaluation, reunification counseling, co-parenting counseling, parenting coordination, and counselor education and supervision.



Sarah Murphy, LPC, NCC (she/her) | [sarahmurphylpc@gmail.com](mailto:sarahmurphylpc@gmail.com)  
Sarah has more than 15 years of clinical experience. She specializes in working with those who have chronic or serious illness. She uses mind-body therapeutic tools such as meditation and energy psychology. In addition to her private therapy practice, Sarah is Staff Counselor for Unite for HER. In addition to her work with PCA, she serves on the board and as communications committee chair of ACEP.



Pat McGowan, Doctoral Student (they/them) | [mcgowanp1@duq.edu](mailto:mcgowanp1@duq.edu)  
Pat graduated from Duquesne University's master's program in August 2021 and is currently a first-year doctoral student in the Duquesne University Counselor Education and Supervision program. They are working toward their LPC in PA at TRAC Services for Families.

## Legislative Advocacy Day 2022

The PCA GRC held its fourth annual Legislative Advocacy Day (LAD) on Saturday, April 2. This FREE virtual event included presentations from ACA, ethics leaders, and your Government Relations team. Participants earned one CEU credit. Keep an eye out for next Spring's LAD!