



March 16, 2020

Office of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky
Governor Andy Beshear
700 Capitol Avenue Suite 100
Frankfort, KY 40601

Governor Beshear,

On behalf of over 3,000 licensed professional counselors in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the Kentucky Counseling Association would like to say thank you for your proactive approach to fighting the spread of COVID-19. As the professional organization for counselors in Kentucky, and a state branch of the American Counseling Association, we want to commend you for your continued focus on mental health as well.

There is a growing concern about continuity of care for our clients as social distancing standards are continued to be put into place. The ethical codes set forth by the American Counseling Association state that continuity of care is essential and we must avoid abandonment of clients. The KY Licensed Professional Counselor Board does have standards currently in place regarding distance counseling. Counselors who are licensed are eligible to engage in telebehavioral health through videoconferencing with proper training in the treatment modality. We are actively providing training resources to our members. The issue remains that even though our licensed counselors are allowed to use HIPAA compliant videoconferencing software to provide mental health counseling, many managed care organizations will not reimburse for such services. So currently, our counselors are forced to choose whether to have clients with mental health issues and oftentimes severe mental illness to continue coming to their office for treatment and risk contracting the illness or risk not getting reimbursed for their services if the payment sources do not reimburse for telebehavioral health. Many of our counselors are being temporarily laid off and thus not meeting the ethical standard of continuity of care and equally important the mental health needs of the constituents of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

The Kentucky Counseling Association is asking for you to consider the following:

- Declare that mental health providers are essential healthcare providers during this time of crisis and allow them to continue seeing clients while following the social distancing requirements
- File an emergency rule for complete telebehavioral health coverage that is completed in office where privacy concerns can be minimized.

- Include mental health workers in the essential need for childcare options given that daycares in the Commonwealth are closing.

As you know, mental health needs tend to go up during times of crisis. We ask that you take a similar stance to that of Governor Mike DeWine from Ohio. Not only do we need to meet the needs of our clients who see us on a regular basis, but this need has been exacerbated by the fear, anxiety, and unknown related to COVID-19. Add that to the other mental health disorders our clients are working through, and our clients need us now more than ever. But we also have to keep ourselves and our families safe. Kentucky suicide rates are already critically high and substance use and related deaths are continuing to grow at an alarming rate. We are working diligently to share with our members resources for training in telebehavioral health and ask that you assist us in the above ways, if possible.

Sincerely,



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