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House of Representatives

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Over the past couple of weeks, there has been a disinformation campaign about the three Compact Bills that you passed this year that they would somehow allow illegal aliens to gain licensure in Georgia. HB 34, HB 268, and HB 395 authorize Georgia to participate in interstate compacts for Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and licensed Professional Counselors. They are not new concepts, as Georgia already is part of five interstate licensure compacts, including doctors, nurses, psychologists, and physical therapists.

The opposition to the three bills defies common sense, First, none of the other interstate compacts, already in place in Georgia for several years have resulted in illegal immigration. Secondly, it is hard to believe that a person illegally in the U.S. would not be identified during a Federal and GBI criminal background check. Third, the applicant must meet the highest standards of the host state so even if another state did allow illegal immigrants to practice, Georgia does not.

These bills allow health professionals noted above to more easily practice across state lines if both states are members of the Compact. They will make it easier for military personnel and their spouses who are relocating to practice in their new state; will facilitate the use of telehealth services; and increase the accessibility of services in rural and other underserved areas.

These practitioners must have a Master or a Doctorate degree. Applicants must submit to a national background check using fingerprints conducted by the FBI, as well as by the GBI. Applicants must pass an approved national exam and sit before a national board. Applicants must conduct years of closely supervised training. These State Boards are responsible for these participants and must ensure their legality and their clean criminal records. Also, applicants must have a valid US Social Security number or a National Practitioner Identification number.

Compacts do NOT supersede Georgia law – anyone operating with them in Georgia must abide by Georgia law. Legislative Counsel has told us that these compacts would make it harder - not easier - for an illegal person to operate here, because the Compact creates a Board that oversees all their members nationwide. Currently, if an illegal alien showed up in Georgia and had a problem in another state, there would be no way for the Georgia Board to know he had a problem in that other state. With these Compacts, they would.

Georgia entered these Compacts in the past and the ones currently being considered because the Pentagon directly asked for them by name. Base commanders from Fort Benning, Fort Stewart, and Fort Gordon spoke to the Joint Defense Commission just last week at Dobbins ARB. Their number one request from the General Assembly was to enact laws to help Military Spouse licensure portability. These Compacts do exactly that. Over the past week, Generals from many of our Georgia bases have written to the Governor, pleading for him to sign these bills. The Office of the Secretary of the Army stated, "Georgia has unfortunately fallen behind in the respect and recognition of our military spouses and families" which they stated was their "Number 1 priority".

With the new administration in Washington – which has already made moves to shrink our military – it is paramount that the Georgia General Assembly does everything we can to protect our nine military bases and the \$28B of annual economic impact and 348,000 jobs they represent in Georgia. These three Compacts alone represent 18,000 civilian jobs in Georgia. Combined with the 750,000 veterans that live in Georgia, that is over a million voters in Georgia.

All three bills passed overwhelmingly with no controversy, either in the General Assembly or at hearings of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council (GORRC). Even though no objections in any subcommittee or committee meetings in the House or Senate Committee hearings or before GORRC- a total of twelve in all- a group has now come forward asking Governor Kemp to veto HB 268, HB 34, and HB 395.

Monday is the last day for the Governor to sign or veto legislation. It would mean a lot to the State of Georgia and especially our military if you could send a one sentence text, email or call to Governor Kemp expressing your support of these three compact bills. They are good public policy supported strongly by the military, the business community, and health care professionals. They facilitate the use of telehealth and greatly reduce the red tape involved in the consideration of requests for reciprocity between participating States.

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