

Lobbyist Report, by Corinne Mixon, Rutledge Ecenia, P.A.

As the lobbyists for the Florida Mental Health Counselors Association (FMHCA) it's important to relay pertinent updates to the Association even when the Florida Legislature is not holding its annual 60-day legislative session. The FMHCA Government Relations Committee (GRC), Board of Directors (Board) and dedicated association members work year-round to ensure that FMCHA is poised to react to Florida's policy and political landscape on behalf of the mental health counseling industry.

Heading into June, both politics and policy are in-play. The midterm elections are heating up and FMHCA is already engaged in discussions with the state board, Florida Department of Health (DOH) and other industry leaders regarding the topic of license portability – a topic that could result in a bill next year.

Florida is in throws of a turbulent midterm election season. From open seats to races where incumbents preside, a slew of ardent-hearted, money-toting candidates are already trading punches, defending records and spending millions on 30 second media buys in anticipation of the August primary and November general election.

And rightly so. The stakes are high. The Florida Senate is currently made up of 23 Republicans and 17 Democrats. It's believed that the Democrats may bring the upper-chamber closer to balanced. In addition, Florida's four cabinet seats are up for grabs and the race for governor will be one of the most watched in the nation. If the "blue wave" persists (Democrats won a massive upset in Florida's most recent special election. Margaret Good beat Vern Buchanan, son of Congressman Buchanan by a whopping 8 points in a district that Donald Trump carried by more than 4 points; article [here](#)) the state is likely to see a subtle shift toward the Democrats.

It's possible that the "blue wave" will flatten and that the Democrats will make only minor gains, but any movement toward Democratic leadership would be abnormal for Florida's recent history. The last time a Democrat served as governor of Florida was 1999 and the Senate hasn't seen a Democratic president since 1993.

These changes could impact how policy is made. The Republicans have remained extremely loyal to their leadership and have accomplished a wealth of their priorities as a result of their cohesion. A closer ratio of Democrat to Republican means extensive negotiating would need to occur in order for legislation to pass. Many of those negotiations would become more bipartisan.

The makeup of the Florida House and Senate has an impact on FMHCA and all Floridians. Contrary to popular belief, state politics has as much, if not more, impact on your daily lives, both personal and professional, than national politics. This Association is the only entity advocating solely for the practice of LMHCs and the people you treat.

One example of that advocacy is FMHCA's recent involvement in a state board workshop to discuss developing legislation to create a portable licensure system or multistate licensure compact. FMHCA holds a valuable seat at the table where the bill may be written. If FMHCA supports the measure, its lobbyists will advocate for the legislation during the 2019 session which begins in March. If the bill is crafted in such a way that FMHCA cannot support it, we will work to kill the legislation. The concept of portability is relatively new in Florida. The injection of fresh faces into the Florida Legislature and Cabinet may bring forth the opportunity for contemporary ideas.

Being a member of FMHCA is one of the most important roles you can play. The profession and its title exist in statute because your professional predecessors engaged in political races, crafted legislation and advocated for the distinction of LMHC.

Your lobbying team and GRC will continue to update you about the topic of licensure portability as well as the upcoming election.

We are proud to lobby on your behalf.