

To Members & Staff of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee

3/9/25

RE: LD 409

To Whom It May Concern:

As a Director of the Downeast School of Massage that has been in business in Maine for the last 45 years and as a Licensed Massage Therapist in Maine (MT 18), I am opposed to LD 409.

Background:

In recent months, there have been a rash of Asian Massage businesses who have come to Maine to set up shop. These businesses have started out innocently enough obtaining Maine State Massage Licenses, (example: Meihua Gao, license number MT6349 who because she had a Maine license was able to begin her business in Waldoboro, subsequently moved to Rockland, her business was investigated and busted for human trafficking and other illegal activities.) and then have repeatedly been investigated and shut down at cost to local, state, and federal agencies. There are individuals, graduating from diploma mill schools in other states, somehow passing the MBLEX exam when they need a translator to speak English, and because they have a transcript and a diploma and have passed the exam, they are getting Maine Massage State Licenses. This is fraud. The state licensing office is not equipped to ferret out the problems we have with fraudulent practices, never mind revoking licenses of these individuals in the involved and illegal practices. Meihua Gao is still active for her license. We do not seem to have a communication system in place that would assist in revoking a license of an individual who has participated in illegal and unethical practices.

We have housekeeping practices that we have to solve in the understaffed licensing department that are not ready to take on any more responsibilities with the ramifications of passing LD 409 at this time. And, should LD 409 go forward and Maine is not part of the conversation to participate in how the compact is put together, run, and have some say in the test that is developed for individuals to take, we will not be able to pioneer this effort. There is no board for massage therapy in Maine, therefore we would not be represented as massage therapists and as a state.

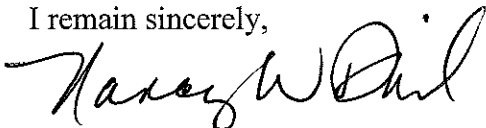
The reason there is a low pass rate of the MBLEX exam in Maine is that there is a school approval process in place which my school, and others in this state, actively participate in every 2 years where the state looks at our curriculum, catalog, faculty, etc. and policies to make sure we are align with educational standards. This is over and above being licensed as a Maine massage school. We go (DSM) beyond what the MBLEX requires as one does not have to have a transcript or graduate from a school to take the MBLEX exam. It is not a standard of education, but right now it is a way for someone to come into Maine and get a license. Fraud in the testing procedures has been apparent to the Federation. Right now individuals who live in another state and only have another state address can easily get a license here in Maine and not even be required to have a Maine address.

In my opinion, we do not have the infrastructure in place to support this act at this time. It has been my experience in the last 51 years as a massage therapist building the health professional career of massage therapy, that a solid foundation is necessary for creating and pioneering new efforts. Ours is weak and at best, barely functioning and allowing fraudulent businesses to start up all over the state with links to New York and human trafficking. The last thing we want to do is make it easier for these individuals to travel state to state. If we are not revoking their licenses here, LD 409 could potentially enable this activity. (The above is public record.)

Please note, the Downeast School of Massage already had 625 hours, so we are not complaining about additional hours. To us, this is not an issue. Our graduates are working well in Maine, are able to take the MBLEX when they move to other states and are licensed already in other states, following their state laws. This issue is really that we (the State of Maine) is/are not ready to support LD 409 at this time.

Should you wish to contact me about the above, the profession of Massage Therapy, or about additional information, please do not hesitate. Thank you for your cooperation and for your work for the people of the State of Maine.

I remain sincerely,



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CC: File, Emily Waltz, Assistant Director DSM, Robert Butler, Selectman Town of Waldoboro