

Kristen Phillips
Lewiston
LD 409

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee.

My name is Kristen Phillips. I have been a licensed massage therapist in Maine for over 20 years, working in Maine.

I strongly oppose LD 409, which would enroll Maine in the Massage Interstate Compact. While increasing mobility for licensed professionals is a worthy goal, this compact presents serious issues that make it unsuitable for Maine.

While the goal of creating more uniformity for massage therapists across states, particularly within healthcare professions, is commendable, this bill does not achieve that result. Maine's current licensing system already has loopholes due to a lack of staffing and clear direction. Additionally, our state's licensing requirements include higher education hours to meet federal loan eligibility standards. Under this compact, Maine would eventually be required to adopt these standards without grandfathering existing licensees. Schools would need to undergo significant changes, and over 3,000 currently licensed massage therapists in Maine could be forced to either comply with new requirements or risk losing their licenses—all to benefit a small percentage of individuals seeking ease of licensure across a limited number of states.

Many Mainers travel to other New England states, as well as Florida and Arizona, yet major states such as New York and Florida do not recognize this compact. The number of Mainers needing to relocate is minimal, and in many cases, applying directly to the state of relocation is more cost-effective than going through the compact process. The cost of the required MBLEX exam is an unnecessary financial burden and does not effectively measure a therapist's competency. Furthermore, the MBLEX is not the highest industry standard, and until Florida and other neighboring New England states adopt this compact, it would be premature for Maine to invest in it.

As an educator who has taught at massage schools in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and as someone who has taken the MBLEX, I can attest that this exam alone does not determine the quality of a massage therapist. If LD 409 passes, in five years' time, existing therapists may be forced to take an exam they never previously needed, risking their licensure while generating ongoing revenue for a private organization. Additionally, it remains unclear who truly benefits financially from this compact. Will the revenue generated support state licensing boards, or will it solely benefit the organization administering the compact? Will LMTs need to prove good standing in their original state, or will Maine's already strained licensing board bear the responsibility of additional verification? The financial and administrative burdens of this compact fall on our state and our massage therapists.

As someone who has practiced massage therapy in multiple states and internationally, I do not see how this compact meaningfully enhances professional mobility. It introduces an additional yearly fee that otherwise would go directly to the state where licensure is sought. Furthermore, most states still do not meet the proposed 625-hour requirement, meaning this compact does not even standardize educational expectations nationwide. The only major licensing hurdle exists in New York, which requires more than double Maine's current minimum hours.

Beyond these concerns, LD 409 does nothing to address the human trafficking issues currently affecting Maine. There is little oversight or enforcement regarding massage therapists involved in illicit activities. With the recent decriminalization efforts, individuals engaged in illegal practices are not arrested and do not lose their massage licenses. This puts the public at risk, as unsuspecting clients may enter an establishment expecting a therapeutic massage and encounter illegal services instead. Strengthening enforcement within Maine should take precedence over adopting an ineffective compact.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject LD 409. Rather than joining a flawed and

incomplete compact, Maine should focus on strengthening its own licensing standards while advocating for meaningful reforms that truly benefit massage therapists and their clients.

Sincerely, Kristen Phillips