

Testimony for LD 2140: “An Act to Enact the Social Work Licensure Compact” for the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services (HCIFS) Committee 2.6.24 at 1pm

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee (HCIFS)

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today my passionate support for Representative Lydia Craft’s LD 2140, The Social Work Compact Bill. My name is Grace Ott. I live in Spruce Head and provide telehealth clinical services through A Personal Call LLC, a private practice. I am also honored to serve as a board member of the National Association of Social Workers Maine Chapter and speak on their behalf, as well as our over 1000+ members of NASW ME today.

Today, I will focus on 3 key areas to hopefully make it easier to explain to your colleagues and constituents what this Social Work Compact Bill will mean for Maine. 1) Mobility & Portability, 2) Continuation of Care, and 3) Workforce Development

- 1) Mobility and Portability** The purpose of the compact, as proposed and funded by the US Dept of Defense and the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), is to increase “mobility of the social worker” and “reduce barriers to portability” of the social work license. This is important to members of our Military, their families, and any of us trying to relocate and join the workforce in a new location with ease and in a timely manner.

I am not in the Military, but I hold clinical social work licenses in Maine and Florida and a master’s level LMSW in New York State due to moving or relocating and living in each of these states at one time or another. The current law requires me to be licensed in each state I want to practice in or offer telehealth in and to be licensed in the state my client is located in as well. This is an undue burden with varying renewal deadlines, high cost of licensing fees, differing continuing education requirements, and keeping up with ever-changing rules and laws in each state.

- 2) Continuity of Care:** The compact will allow us to offer “continuity of care” to those living or visiting out of state, including “Snowbirds,” college students, young adults who may be out of Maine for a period, Mainers on extended vacations, needing medical treatment elsewhere or working remotely for a season.

What happens now if one of my clients moves across the border to New Hampshire to seek medical care not available here or has family close by for caregiving? So sorry, I cannot see them anymore due to not being licensed in New Hampshire. Or, if I visit my granddaughter out of state, I must take time off of my telehealth practice because I am not licensed in the state where my granddaughter is. For the high school graduate I see in Maine over the summer and then goes to college in another state, I can no longer provide that continuity of care. It makes no sense. One of the benefits of telehealth is that it is more accessible. I am the same therapist if I

am in Maine or another State. We need our clients to be able to continue care with their trusted provider, wherever they may be.

- 3) Workforce Development:** This will increase access to all social work and behavioral health services, help recruit and retain social work graduates, and improve income potential for social workers in Maine. This compact will allow us to recruit and retain new social workers, and their license process can be streamlined if it is part of the compact. Being able to apply for jobs in Maine, knowing that you have a compact/multi-license already, makes the hiring process faster because you do not have to wait to get licensed in Maine. With the Compact, Mainers will be able to access behavioral health specialists in other states that are members of the compact, opening up the pool of providers to help Mainers get the care they deserve.

Recently, a master's level social work student told me that several classmates plan to leave Maine for better-paying jobs out of state even though they love Maine and wish they could live here. Once the compact is passed, students from other states may want to stay and/or move to Maine because of the potential future earnings of providing clinical services to Mainers and non-Mainers from states with higher reimbursement rates. Our schools of social work are supportive of the compact. The VA is a-buzz about the prospect of "travel social workers, " just like "travel nurses" who have been critical to staffing our hospitals.

To get to the language in this bill today, 17 different "contributing organizations and stakeholders" provided initial input to the Council of State Governments/National Center for Interstate Compacts in Lexington, KY (www.swcompact.org). Years of revising drafts by these stakeholders, boards, and by many individuals through Zoom meetings and online surveys created the language in this bill. No changes to the language in LD2140 can be made as multiple states are voting on the exact same language, as presented in this bill today. On the Interstate Compact website, you can see an interactive map of the United States showing states that have already passed the Compact (Missouri) and the 24 other states currently moving it through their legislative process.

Social workers can remain with a "single state" license and are not required to get a compact/multi-state license. If Maine is one of the first 7 states to pass the compact, triggering the compact to take effect, we will become what is known as a "Charter Member" (Section 14). All states that pass the social work compact legislation will be members of the Commission (Section 10). All the member states of the Commission will elect an up to 11-member "Executive Committee"(Section 10 D). I want Maine to be one of the first 7 States to pass the Social Work Compact like it was for the Counseling Compact (House Paper 1427/Legislative Document 1920) you all approved on March 31, 2022, and Governor Mills signed into law. To date, the Counseling Compact has 28 States in its compact.

Passing the Social Work Compact bill does not compromise Maine's ability to change our exam requirements in this state, as discussed 2 weeks ago in this committee. This bill explicitly states "the substantial equivalency of the foregoing competency requirements" is one of the options to satisfy competency for each level of social work licensure" (Section 4:B.c).

In Conclusion: 3 Areas to Remember: 1) Mobility/Portability; 2) Continuation of Care; and 3) Social Work Services and Behavioral Health Workforce Development.

I have FOMO, "Fear Of Missing Out". Do not let Maine miss out on this. The time is Now to pass LD 2140: An Act to Enact a Social Work Licensure Compact.

Sincerely,

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