

February 6, 2024

To Chairs Senator Bailey and Representative Perry, and the Respected Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services,

I am Lauren Porter, a social work Master's student from Maine, advocating for LD 2140 - An Act to Enact the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, which promises to enhance care accessibility and continuity in social work. My journey into social work, interwoven with personal struggles, has highlighted the critical shortage of behavioral health providers in Maine. The long waitlist I encountered to see a clinical social worker was met with licensing barriers that prevented me from receiving care from capable providers available outside of Maine, underscoring systemic issues in access to care. This illustrates the dire need for reform and the creation of a compact that facilitates cross-state licensure, ensuring no one must endure the helplessness of being told, "We can't help you because of where you live."

With an Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact, I see a future where Maine not only retains its talented providers but also welcomes the expertise of out-of-state professionals. This is especially vital in fields like substance use disorder treatment, where Maine faces significant provider gaps. We desperately need to fill the critical shortage of behavioral health problems and expand access to care for far too many Mainers who are waiting day after day.

Given the national standardization of social work education through CSWE accreditation, it's logical for licensure to follow suit, allowing for a more unified and effective professional practice. This universal standard underscores the compact's rationale; if our education and values know no borders, why should our licensure? It is time our licensing system reflects this reality. Implementing the compact will not only aid in meeting the immediate needs of our communities but will also foster a more interconnected and resilient social work profession.

The stories I've encountered, both personally and professionally, speak volumes about the unnecessary hurdles faced due to licensure limitations. Long waitlists and restricted access to care are not just inconveniences; they represent a systemic failure to meet our community's most pressing needs. LD 2140 is a beacon of hope for those caught in the bureaucratic limbo of state-specific licensure. The compact not only enables Maine's social workers to extend their services beyond state lines but also attracts skilled professionals to Maine. This will foster a more dynamic, interconnected professional community that can adapt to Maine's evolving needs, ensuring that our state remains an attractive place for social workers to practice and live.

I urge you to consider the profound impact that the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact will have on our state and on the profession I hold dear. In supporting LD 2140, we champion the essential right to accessible care, breaking down geographical barriers to meet the needs of all Mainers and beyond. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Lauren Porter, BSW, CADC, MHRT/C