



Oregon

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HB 2357

House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

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Chair Nosse and Members of the Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee,

House Bill 2357 would enact Compact Licensure of Speech-Language Pathologists, Audiologists as well as Occupational Therapists, which is governed in Oregon by a separate Board. The Compact is an agreement between states to allow these professionals with a Compact Privilege to practice in Oregon without prior review by the Oregon Board. The Board of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology was created by the Legislature in 1973 to ensure the availability of the highest possible quality speech-language pathology and audiology services to people of this state who have communication disabilities. The Board licenses and regulates Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs) and Audiologists. When I started in 2015 we had about 2,100 licensees and today there are more than 4,000 with that number continuing to increase by at least 13% per biennium.

The compact is still in the early development phase and is not yet operational. I attended the Compact organization's first organizational meeting in 2017 and have followed its development closely. In September, I went to their Commission meeting in San Antonio where I was able to share brief remarks and ask questions to gather more clarity on the subject. My own education, training and expertise is in agency and nonprofit management and board operations. I have ongoing questions about how this compact is developing, especially in the areas of transparency, conflict of interest, financing, budget, mission, and lack of rules to date as to how they will conduct regulation.

State of workforce in Oregon: The Board of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists has updated our rules to increase opportunity for licensure over the past several years. The Oregon Legislature put expedited licensure for military spouse for all medical professional boards into statute years ago. Our Board was one of the first to enact Telepractice rules prior to the pandemic and have since licensed more people from outside of Oregon to serve Oregonians than people who actually live here. In 2024, 85% of new fully licensed Oregon SLPs do not live in Oregon. The majority of those from out of state are not from our neighboring states of Washington, Idaho or even California, but from across the country including Florida. We license on average in under 2 days. We have increased efficiency and are nearly paperless. Any qualified SLP in the world can be licensed in Oregon in under a week and in fact we have licensees in six foreign countries right now.

Telepractice is great when it works. When it does not, it is not good. In a recent case we discovered that a whole cadre of Oregon's school children never saw the actual SLP for an entire school year. The students and parents believed the speech-language therapy assistant who worked with them all year was actually the speech-language pathologist, who

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

was legally responsible for their care. However, in this case, against Oregon Statutes and Rules, the SLP never laid eyes or ears on any of those children, even via telepractice. It is important for the Board to have oversight and regulatory responsibility of these practitioners.

Access to (telepractice) services for rural Oregonians: Oregon has permissive telepractice rules, allowing its licensees to provide services from, or to, anywhere in the world. Oregon rules even allow for the remote supervision of Speech-Language Pathology Assistant's from SLP's living across the USA.

Potential compact costs: Exact cost is unknown for adopting this compact, however the Board anticipates needing to hire additional staff and utilize additional DOJ review, which is paid for by Oregon licensee fees. As such, revenue will be used to support the oversight and processing of compact licensees and may draw from the funds used currently to support the oversight and support the Board provides to Oregon practitioners. As a self-funded agency, the Board may need to raise fees to make up for the cost of the compact commission. The compact will not replace a state license costs as the compact still requires the SLP to purchase a "compact privilege" in each state. For Oregon-based Audiologists and SLPs that wish to practice in other states, they will need to pay all Oregon licensing fees (Home state), and then pay a compact fee, plus a privilege to practice fee for each state in which they want to practice. Since more than 85% of all new Oregon licenses do not live here as their Home State, the Board may lose most or all of that revenue to the compact. It will be eligible for the state privilege fee paid by out of state people, but under the control of the compact.

Many boards use reciprocity agreements with neighboring states to enhance workforce and ease licensure in different states. We have sample language available for a reciprocity agreement and we look forward to an opportunity to discuss that and additional opportunities to support and grow our workforce.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Erin Knight Haag, Executive Director
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