

Submitter: Deborah Benschung
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2554

Deborah (Debbie) Benschung
1310 NW Naito Parkway, Unit 205
Portland OR 97209
debbsenweb@gmail.com
February 18, 2025

House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Support for HB 2554 – Social Work Licensure Compact

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Javadi and Nelson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Deborah Benschung, and I am a licensed social worker in Oregon. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2554, which would allow Oregon to join the Social Work Licensure Compact.

I have been a licensed social worker in Oregon since 1992. I have been committed to the practice of clinical social work my entire career. There are many reasons I became a social worker but the main one is my desire to make a difference in people's lives in meaningful ways. I work as a psychotherapist and addictions counselor with a focus in complex trauma. The demand for mental health providers is high and social workers provide a very high percentage of mental health services.

Like many of my colleagues, I have witnessed firsthand the growing demand for social work services in our state. Burnout is at an all-time high, and we simply do not have enough social workers to meet the needs of all Oregonians. By joining the compact, we can help address this crisis by making it easier for qualified professionals to work in Oregon, reducing barriers to licensure, and expanding the social work workforce.

This bill would also provide much-needed relief for existing social workers by increasing our professional mobility. Many of us have family in other states or want the flexibility to work across state lines through telehealth. Unfortunately, the current system requires social workers to apply for and maintain multiple state licenses,

which can be costly and time-consuming. Each license application can cost hundreds of dollars, and ongoing renewal fees add to the financial burden, creating unnecessary barriers for qualified professionals who want to provide care where it is most needed. I currently have to pay for three different state clinical licenses because I want to provide continuity of care. I have clients in Washington state across the river, and I ended up needing to get a Washington state social work license just to be able to provide routine care for them. Sometimes, they come to my office, and sometimes I see them via telehealth from their home.

Additionally, the lack of licensure reciprocity limits access to care for clients who travel frequently for work, have seasonal residences, need to go help an aging family member or move between states. Without the compact, clients often lose continuity of care simply because their social worker is not licensed in multiple states. I cannot afford to get individually licensed in all the states just to provide care to clients who are temporarily outside of Oregon. HB 2554 would help eliminate these disruptions and ensure that Oregonians can receive consistent, high-quality support no matter where they are.

Typically, Oregon is a leader in taking progressive steps in the delivery of healthcare services. I hope this strong tradition continues. I strongly urge you to support this legislation so that Oregon can take a crucial step toward addressing our social work shortage, reducing financial barriers for professionals, and improving access to care for those who need it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Deborah Benschling, LCSW OR