

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

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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-Chair's Javadi and Nelson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Melanie Kelly, 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 since 2005 in both Oregon and Washington. The need for a nationwide registry of social workers, counselors and therapists became very apparent to be during the COVID 19 pandemic when we saw clients migrating around the nation. Our agency saw many youth leaving the state to go get support from family members in other states as their parents struggled to work and provide care/education at the same time. The clinicians in our agency were then mandated to discontinue seeing clients (children who were struggling with mental/behavioral health during a national crisis) because the clinician was not licensed in the state the youth was temporarily staying in. This really highlighted for me, the need for what ideally would be a national registry, or reciprocity between states in our nation. People, children especially should not have to discontinue quality care from providers whom they have a strong relationship with because they have to be in another state temporarily. With the increased and advanced use and comfort around telehealth, I would argue that this could allow access to those in areas that do not have many providers or for those who prefer to receive therapy virtually.

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. HB 2554 would streamline this process and ensure that Oregon remains a competitive and attractive place for social workers.

I strongly urge you to support this legislation so that Oregon can take a crucial step toward addressing our social work shortage and improving access to care. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Melanie Kelly LCSW