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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 Hector Zaragoza, 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 devoted to serve Oregonians across the state with a particular passion to serve rural communities like my own in Southern Oregon. My home towns of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, and Medford were devastated by the 2020 Almeda Fire that was a Federally declared disaster that disproportionately impacted low-income, elderly, and countless Migrant Seasonal Farmworker families. Many families in my hometown are still devastated, unhoused, and struggling to recover post-disaster. I wish to use my Clinical Social Work training to open my own bilingual mental health clinic and support my local community.

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.

In my own case, I graduated from Portland State University in June 2024 and accepted the honor to pursue clinical training at the prestigious Yale Child Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. As I have prepared to come back home to Oregon, I have faced countless bureaucratic barriers that have impacted my ability to have my credentials honored in Oregon which leads to difficulty landing employment, thus putting me in financial hardship. Due to these barriers, I have been forced to work temporarily outside of my field in order to make ends meet and to afford paying licensing fees in multiple states. My story is an example of 'brain waste' in Oregon which has multiple unintended impacts: We have specialists who are not able to use their skills to contribute to an already strained workforce, and we are unnecessarily delaying Oregonians from receiving care from licensed mental health providers.

I have since accepted employment outside of Oregon which is great for me on an individual level, at the same time I am saddened that I faced too many barriers to practicing in my home state and support my colleagues during our current federal shortage of licensed mental health providers.

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,  
Hector Zaragoza