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On Behalf Of:

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Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB476

We heard today from many foreign professionals who have been stuck in limbo by Oregon's difficulty recognizing foreign qualifications; forced to DoorDash while Oregon's healthcare system suffers a chronic labor shortage. My personal story follows roughly the same beats - though I've had many more structural advantages, I've still run into the same frustrating roadblocks that are damaging me personally, and Oregon's healthcare as a whole. Luckily, these are easy problems to fix - 476 doesn't go far enough in my opinion, but it's a step in the right direction!

I've been working in Oregon for nearly three years as a mental health therapist. I have a foreign postgraduate degree (PhD, Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, UK). I've tried for two years to get this degree recognized by the Oregon Board of Licensed Professional Counselors (OBLPCT) so that I can get on track to licensure. In brief, this process has been slow and painful for many reasons. OBLPCT has found my degree to not match the criteria needed to be considered equivalent to a US LPC degree. But they've made this judgment without ever investigating what my degree involved. I've provided them with, for example, written testimony from Cambridge tuition staff, and Cambridge contacts with these staff, which they've refused to read or follow up on.

What's exacerbated the above issues, and drawn this process out to two years, are the many challenges involved in communicating with OBLPCT. Their website makes it very challenging to find out what's required, find the necessary paperwork to complete, etc. for anyone not taking the standard track towards licensure (with a US degree). They only provide an email address for communication, and respond after 1-2 weeks, which draw out conversations to months which could have been resolved in one phone call (which I've asked for many times). They've consistently responded to my questions with proforma responses that don't address my specific question at all, but which repeat information I already had from the website.

I have every advantage in the world when it comes to working with the OBLPCT. I'm a native English speaker, very familiar with navigating our style of bureaucracy, holding a degree, recorded in English, from a university everybody recognizes by name. I'm a born US citizen with financial security. If even I have been unable after two years of trying to get my degree recognized, I can't imagine the nightmare that a non-native English speaker from a different culture, with a different educational background, must experience.

I personally have reluctantly decided to enroll in a US master's program for 21

months, so that I can get licensed via the conventional route. This is costly and interferes with my ability to do my job, providing mental healthcare to Oregonians. But compared to the many stories we heard today, I'm one of the lucky ones!

A little more resourcing and some changes of policy at OBLPCT pays for itself - it will yield a phenomenal return of highly skilled foreign healthcare professionals, who are right now wasting their talents in a state of desperate limbo. I suspect we don't even need increased resources to achieve this, but instead, a reduction in stringent requirements in favor of a bit of flexibility when it comes to recognizing foreign credentials, which may not always look the same on paper as their US equivalents.