

January 30, 2024

Testimony on **LD 2140** – *An Act to Enact the Interstate Social Work Licensing Compact*

Good afternoon Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments in support of LD 1877. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW ME). On behalf of our over 1000 members here in Maine, I'm honored to share thoughts on this important piece of proposed legislation. I also am a licensed clinical social worker with almost 25 years of experience providing and leading behavioral health services across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. Most of my clinical career has been spent supporting children and families residing here in our great state.

As you might know, social workers provide the majority of mental health services in Maine and across the nation. The Department of Defense in 2021, as part of an initiative to promote license portability for military spouses, recognized the social work profession as an component of health care and community services and funded an initiative to establish model legislation for multistate social work licensing.

According to the Department of Defense, military families move every three years on average. The Compact will help military spouses relocate and begin work without delay by reducing the time and effort needed to gain authorization to practice in a new state, even when compared to expedited licensure laws for military spouses. The Social Work Compact will improve access for military families to care and increase licensure portability for social workers while maintaining the current system of state licensure. Maine and states across the nation are contending with a shortage of mental health providers, and an interstate compact will allow for practice mobility and remove barriers preventing social workers from providing continuity of care. The Compact will also improve the tedious, time-consuming, and expensive process of social workers having to gain licensure in each state where they want to practice.

The Council of State Governments oversaw the development of the legislation, and NASW nationally contributed to the development of the model legislation. Seven states must enact the Model Social Work Compact Bill before the Compact Commission is established. There is a sense of urgency to this point as there is a seat on the Compact Commission for those first states to successfully pass the Compact. Missouri was the first state to enact the Social Work Compact in the Spring of 2023. The Commission will serve as an administrative body overseeing the Interstate Compact for Social Workers. While we have been told that all states who pass the Compact will have representation on the Compact Commission, it would be very beneficial for Maine to have one of those initial Commission seats.

As you are aware, Maine already participates in a number of health and behavioral health care compacts including audiology and speech language therapists, professional counselors, physicians, nursing, occupational therapists, psychology, and physical therapists. Much like the existing licensure compacts, the Social Work Licensure Compact will benefit clients and the social work profession by:

- Ensuring continuity of care when clients or social workers who relocate or travel.
- Increasing access to care for clients.
- Modernizing data sharing between states which optimizes public protections for vulnerable clients.

- Simplifying current interstate licensure processes.
- Enhancing mobility for social workers who meet uniform requirements.
- Allowing military personnel and spouses to maintain their certifications when relocating.

The Social Work Compact is a long-term solution to the issue of licensure portability, practice across state lines, and workforce shortages in behavioral health. With these benefits in mind, NASW Maine Chapter is excited to endorse LD 2140 and urges your support in the passage of this critical legislation. We welcome questions from the Committee at any time and would be eager to participate in any future work sessions for LD 2140.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris McLaughlin, LCSW". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW
Executive Director, Maine Chapter – NASW