



SHAE SORTWELL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony
Assembly Committee on Health
May 16, 2023
Assembly Bills 207 & 208

Chairman Moses and members of the Assembly Committee on Health – Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on ABs 207 and 208, relating to the ratification of the Counseling and Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology compacts.

These two bills stemmed from the Study Committee on Occupational Licenses, of which I co-chaired with Senator Stafsholt. The study committee was created with the goal of finding solutions so current and future license holders can be licensed in a timely manner. We were tasked with finding long-term solutions that would fix the problems plaguing DSPS.

Two policy mechanisms that quicken the process for out-of-state license holders to come to Wisconsin are universal licensure recognition and compacts. Both are sufficient, but the latter, in particular, can be a longer process due to the need for multiple states to sign on before it can take effect. Luckily, both compacts have already reached the minimum number of states. Therefore, if Wisconsin enacted either one, it would be active quickly.

Simply put, AB 207 would allow professional counselors from other compact states to transition to Wisconsin with ease. And AB 208 would do the same for speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this legislation and would gladly answer any questions the committee may have.



ROB STAFSHOLT

STATE SENATOR • 10th SENATE DISTRICT

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TO: Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt
DATE: May 16, 2023
SUBJECT: Testimony in Favor of Assembly Bills 207 & 208

Thank you, Chairman Moses and members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care, for allowing me to submit testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 207 and 208.

Over the last couple of years, I have heard from many frustrated constituents that are dealing with unnecessary delays, confusion and lack of communication while attempting to get an occupational license from the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DPS). These unnecessary delays cause individuals to postpone starting their careers or stops them from entering the workforce. Wisconsin businesses are struggling to find qualified workers so we need to ensure our licensure process is streamlined and functions efficiently. We cannot afford to fall behind other states in attracting skilled individuals to live and work in our state.

In response, leadership created the Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licenses, and Representative Sortwell and I were appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair. The study committee was created with the goal of finding solutions so current and future license holders can be licensed in a timely manner. In other words, we were tasked with finding long-term solutions that will fix the problems plaguing DPS.

Through our conversations with licensed professionals, research and policy groups, and the Department of Safety and Professional Services, our study committee focused our bill recommendations on three primary issue areas: data tracking, workload simplification, and reciprocal credentialing.

Assembly bills 207 and 208 fall under the third issue area of reciprocal credentialing. The study committee recommended Assembly Bill 207, which enters Wisconsin into the Counseling Compact, allowing a professional counselor from another compact state to provide professional counseling services here under a "privilege to practice."

The study committee also recommended Assembly Bill 208, which enters Wisconsin into the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact, which grants a similar "privilege to practice" here, for a person from another compact state.

Study committee members broadly supported these bills and recommended them for introduction. We felt like these bills would improve processing and credentialing. Thank you for your support of these bills and feel free to reach out with any questions.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care

FROM: Chelsea Fibert, WCA Government Affairs Associate

DATE: Tuesday, May 16, 2023

SUBJECT: Support for Assembly Bill 207: Entering Wisconsin into the Counseling Compact

Just as all Wisconsin businesses have struggled to attract and retain workforce in recent years, so too have Wisconsin's 72 counties. While there are many reasons for the worker shortage, occupation licensing has created unnecessary burdens for individuals looking to enter or remain in the workforce. The current occupational licensing system must be streamlined and simplified.

At a time when human services departments are dealing with a workforce shortage, significant challenges in recruiting/retaining staff and licensing delays further exacerbate the shortage. Applicants for professional licenses often encounter long delays for application review and may have to resubmit materials due to lost/misplaced documents. The current situation is frustrating for both professionals needing licensure, DSPS as the licensing agency, and county departments as employers.

County human service departments are responsible for serving and protecting vulnerable populations, such as children who are abused or neglected, adults with disabilities, and persons with mental health and substance use disorders. If county agencies are short staffed due to licensing delays, the clients are directly impacted. Licensing delays may prevent agencies from filling vacancies and assigning cases to new workers, which can result in remaining workers having unreasonably high caseloads. High caseloads can lead to unsafe outcomes for the consumers.

This bill would allow professional, licensed counselors residing in a compact member state to practice in other member states without the need for multiple licenses. Compacts provide a pathway for counselors to move seamlessly from one state to another through an agreement among states to recognize another state's license. Previously, counselors have had difficulty transferring their licenses from one state/jurisdiction to another because of the independent nature of jurisdictional licensing rules and regulations. There is little consistency regarding the requirements for licensure and these varying requirements make it difficult to transfer credentials across state lines.

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The Counseling Compact enables professional counselors who meet uniform licensure requirements to quickly obtain a privilege to practice, which is equivalent to a license to practice counseling in another state. Thus, opening up Wisconsin as a place to live and work when seeking employment.

WCA respectfully requests your support of AB 207 and please don't hesitate to contact the WCA office with any questions. Thank you for your consideration.



Through our exceptional health care services, we reveal the healing presence of God.

Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care

2023 Assembly Bill 207

Ratification of the Counseling Compact

May 16th, 2023

Chair Moses and members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 207, which would ratify the Counseling Compact in the state of Wisconsin. We appreciate this piece of legislation being brought forward, and the work of the 2022 Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licenses.

SSM Health is a Catholic, not-for-profit health system serving the comprehensive health needs of communities across the Midwest through a robust and fully integrated health care delivery system. The organization's more than 40,000 employees and physicians, including approximately 14,500 in Wisconsin, are committed to providing exceptional health care services and revealing God's healing presence to everyone they serve. Our footprint in the state includes seven hospitals, ten post-acute care facilities, and more than 85 physician offices and other outpatient care sites. We also operate in the states of Missouri, Illinois, and Oklahoma.

As a health care system that provides care in multiple states, we are generally supportive of compacts and the benefit they produce for patient access across a multitude of different health-related professions. We have seen firsthand benefits of occupational licensure compacts and know they reduce barriers for practitioners who wish to provide service across state lines. Our organization is also working to implement a multi-state virtual behavioral health integration project to provide timely access to mental health services to patients in primary care. The regionalized use of virtual and telehealth services, and having providers who can practice in this fashion, is key to the success of this project and to growing points of access for our patients.

The Counseling Compact is one such compact we have been supportive of, and SSM Health believes that AB 207 will benefit patients while also preserving high-quality care and standards that Wisconsin is known for. Moreover, the other states in which we operate have made progress on the Counseling Compact, too. Earlier this month, Oklahoma ratified their compact, making them the 25th state to do so. Additionally, the state of Missouri recently has passed their Counseling Compact proposal and it just needs to be signed into law. Our system would like to see Wisconsin added to this list.

At a time when mental health services are increasingly needed by all types of patients and where there are workforce shortages, especially in rural areas of Wisconsin, we want to find ways for high-quality, skilled workers to provide essential care for the communities we serve. We hope this compact can build off other helpful changes that have been made without compromising important standards and look forward to working with the Legislature on this and other ideas to increase access to care.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments in support of Assembly Bill 207. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to SSM Health's Director of Government Affairs, Ben Van Pelt, at benjamin.vanpelt@ssmhealth.com.



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2023

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Date: Monday, May 15, 2023

To: Representative Moses and members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care

From: Dr. Mike Zussman
Licensed Professional Counselor
License no. 4823-125 WI

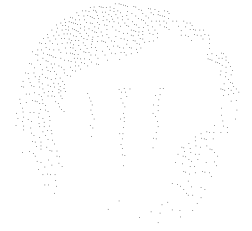
Re: Assembly Bill 207 Relating to: ratifying and entering Wisconsin into the Counseling Compact

First, thank you for considering this testimony. The Wisconsin Psychological Association (WPA) and I are excited about the prospect of Wisconsin joining the Counseling Compact. Our organization was very active in supporting PSYPACT during the 2021-2022 legislative term and strongly supports this legislation to extend interstate practice to Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC).

My reasons for supporting this are both professional and personal because I am an LPC in addition to serving as the Vice-President of WPA. I believe my reasons for supporting this legislation is widely shared by other LPC's.

My practice is focused in the Milwaukee area where I have been practicing for just over ten years. While I started by working with a younger population, I have since focused my practice to focus primarily on working with adolescents while also seeing some children and adults. My practice has evolved into a hybrid model consisting of mostly in-person sessions but including telehealth sessions as well. This works well for my adolescent clients who graduate high school and stay in Wisconsin to attend college. However, I do have many clients who chose to go attend college out-of-state. Due to the current restrictions, I am not allowed to provide services to those clients until they return to Wisconsin unless I expend time and money to obtain licenses in each of those states.

Moving away from home and to college can be hard for some. They would find more success if there was a continuation of care. I find that most of my clients are hesitant to seek services out-of-state because they do not know the area and do not want to establish another relationship with a second provider. If Wisconsin were to join the Counseling Compact, I would be able to continue seeing my clients when they attend college in reciprocal states.



For example, I have clients at Tulane in Louisiana, University of Washington, University of Colorado – Boulder, and at DePauw University in Indiana, all states that are members of the Counseling Compact. I have other clients attending college in Illinois, New York, and Iowa which are all states like Wisconsin with pending legislation to join.

Speaking from experience, it is difficult for providers to obtain licensure in other states. If Wisconsin were to join the Counseling Compact, other providers would see Wisconsin as another place where they could establish a practice much more easily if coming from a reciprocal state. Many of the providers I know have long waitlists to be seen. By welcoming more providers from Counseling Compact states, we can potentially reduce the waiting period that many people must endure in order to be seen for psychological services.

I am really encouraged to learn that our legislature is considering this move. Only about half of the states are members of this compact while a handful more have pending legislation to join. By joining this compact in addition to PSYPACT (which we recently joined), Wisconsin has the potential to show the rest of the country that we are serious about addressing our mental health needs. While this would be such a beneficial move for the providers in our state, more importantly, it would greatly benefit our clients in many ways. Thank you again for your consideration.