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TO: Senate Committee on Health
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt
DATE: March 12, 2025
SUBJECT: Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 74

Thank you, Chairman Cabral-Guevara and members of the Senate Committee on Health, for allowing me to submit testimony in favor of Senate Bill 74.

Wisconsin is facing a severe shortage of social workers, and the legal restrictions under current law impede their ability to deliver care to those in need.

This bill enters Wisconsin into the Social Work Licensure Compact, which provides the opportunity for a social worker to practice in other compact states without needing additional red tape and licensure.

Participation in the Compact provides multiple other benefits, including addressing workforce shortages, which is especially helpful in rural and/or border areas, facilitating telehealth, streamlining the licensing process for both the boards and the social workers, encouraging continuity of care when social workers or clients relocate, as well as other benefits.

Many other professions have licensure compacts to ease these burdens, including physicians, nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, EMTs, physical therapists, psychologists, audiology and speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, counselors, and more. Adding social workers to this list is a common-sense way to streamline this process.

Thank you, members. I ask for your support and would be happy to meet with you to address any concerns or answer any questions about this bill.



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: March 12th, 2025

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 74

Thank you Chairperson Cabral-Guevara for holding a hearing on SB 74 today and thank you to members of the Senate Committee on Health for being here. As many of you are aware, interstate compacts allow states to coordinate across state lines and create agreements to implement standards for licensing of specific professions. Wisconsin has recently enacted legislation allowing our state to participate in a number of interstate compacts including the Dental Compact, the Physical Therapy Compact, the Occupational Therapy Compact, the Enhanced Nurse Licensing Compact (eNLC), and others.

As you're probably familiar with, Senate Bill 74, which ratifies the Social Work Compact in our state, is not notably different from a number of compacts that this committee and this body has worked with, passed, and enacted in the past few years. The Social Work Licensure Compact allows for Social Workers to practice either in person or virtually across state lines in states that have enacted it. As a result, quick and efficient access to social work services will be increased. To date, twenty-two states have passed the Social Work Compact, including Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri.

Under this compact, a professional in Wisconsin wishing to obtain an *optional* compact license would apply to receive the license and then, if issued, be able to receive a privilege to practice in other compact states. The inverse would be true for compact licensees from other states wishing to practice in our state. State participation in the Compact will provide a number of benefits to licensed professionals, including: eliminating the need for Social Workers to hold licenses in multiple states, facilitating telehealth, supporting workforce needs across states, streamlining licensing administration for licensing boards and licensed Social Workers, promoting continuity of care when Social Workers or clients relocate, allowing Social Workers to expand services into new areas, and promoting uniformity of licensing standards.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today, the opportunity for a public hearing on this legislation, and the chance to move this bill forward in the process. Also, thank you to the committee members that already registered their support by co-sponsoring this bill and I respectfully ask all of you to help ratify this compact here in Wisconsin.

TESTIMONY PROVIDED BY NASW-WI MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR NADIR CARLSON IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 74, THE SOCIAL WORK LICENSURE COMPACT BILL

Chairperson Cabral-Guevara and members of the Senate Committee on Health.

My name is Nadir Carlson, I am the Membership and Communications Coordinator for the National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin Chapter. NASW-WI is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in our state.

I am pleased to speak in support of Senate Bill 74, the Social Work Licensure Compact.

Currently, a social worker must maintain a license in each state they practice. Wisconsin has a pathway for an out-of-state licensed social worker to obtain a temporary license while they work through the application process.

The Social Work Licensure Compact will tremendously ease the licensure process for social workers moving to Wisconsin. Scores of Licensed Clinical Social Workers have reached out to our chapter office expressing difficulty in getting licensed in Wisconsin. Many of these social workers have decades of experience providing mental health therapy. Some social workers have given up on obtaining licensure here. This is at a time of a tremendous shortage of mental health providers statewide.

Measures to address the difficulties faced by out-of-state social workers moving to Wisconsin have been implemented by the Department of Safety and Professional Services. Once the Compact is implemented nationwide, social workers moving to Wisconsin will have a simpler process. They would be required to go through a background check, take the open-book state jurisprudence exam and then get licensed.

Joining the Compact will allow for the increased use of telehealth, especially in underserved portions of our state. Telehealth has enabled clients with transportation, childcare, health, financial or other barriers to get mental health treatment. It has also enabled clients with language barriers—whether it be Spanish, Hmong, French, American Sign Language or the many other languages spoken in our state, to receive services they can understand. In this post-COVID era, we are seeing an increase in mobility of Wisconsin residents. Unfortunately, residents who were receiving mental health services and moved out of state temporarily, are often not allowed to receive mental health services from their Wisconsin therapists. States generally require a therapist to be licensed in

the state where the clients reside in order to provide services. This has a very negative impact on clients who have developed trusting relationships with their therapist and do not want to start all over with a new therapist.

The Social Work Licensure Compact will solve this problem by allowing clinical social workers to serve clients in any state participating in the Compact.

Implementation of the Social Work Licensure Compact is moving fast. Twenty-two states have joined the compact including our neighbors Minnesota and Iowa. Legislation is currently making its way through nearly twenty other states including Illinois and Michigan. Currently, the Compact Commission is setting the national ground rules for the Social Work Licensure Compact. Wisconsin joining the compact will have a benefit for social workers and the general public.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify on the Social Work Licensure Compact. I am happy to answer any questions.

Nadir Carlson, MSW
Membership and Communications Coordinator

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Dale Decker

Senate Committee on Health – Relating to: ratification of the Social Work Licensure Compact (Senate Bill 74)

March 12, 2025

Senator Cabral-Guevara and committee members:

My name is Dale Decker. I'm a lifelong resident of Wisconsin and a small business owner in Madison. I co-own a psychotherapy clinic with 13 clinicians who serve hundreds of clients.

The Social Work Licensure Compact will have many benefits to the public including increased access to care and better continuity of care when a client moves to another state.

It will also have benefits to the business community by making it easier to find highly qualified mental health professionals and reducing the significant lag that can occur in becoming licensed if the therapist is coming from another state.

We recently had this occur and it was only because of the pandemic emergency rules that our new therapist was able to begin work after just one week. Under the regular rules, it would have taken months for her to become licensed leading to longer wait time for clients and reduced income for our clinic.

Please pass the Social Worker Licensure Compact to ensure clients can receive the services they need and small businesses can function efficiently.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important matter.

Most sincerely,



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Lauren Gourley, LCSW
Maple Tree Wellness, LLC
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March 12, 2025

Lauren Gourley, LCSW, PMH-C, IMH-E
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re: Senate Bill 74 Social Work Licensure Compact legislation

Chairperson Sen. Cabral-Guevara and members of the Senate Committee on Health:

My name is Lauren Gourley and I am a licensed clinical social worker and psychotherapist specializing in infant and maternal mental health and psychotherapy and reflective consultation for health care providers. I have lived and worked in La Crosse for nine years and prior to our move to this great state I worked as a clinical social worker in California and later New York. Today, I stand before you to advocate for the passage of Senate Bill 74, the Social Work Interstate Compact, an important piece of legislation that will benefit both the social work profession and children, individuals, and families we serve here in Wisconsin.

Social workers play an essential role in the lives of individuals and families across our state. Timely access to qualified mental health professionals is not just important—it can be life-saving. Wisconsin, like many states, faces a significant shortage of licensed mental health providers. This shortage is particularly severe in rural and underserved areas. In 2019, 52 of the state's 72 counties were designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas for mental health¹. As a result, many are left waiting for help or unable to find services at all. In La Crosse, it is not unusual for people to wait a year or longer for psychological care. The Social Work Interstate Compact would streamline the licensing process and allow licensed social workers in other compact states to practice via telehealth in Wisconsin, infusing the state with many more providers able to meet Wisconsin's mental health needs. This is just one way of many where the Social Work Interstate Compact will make a profound difference.

One of my specializations is treating very young children who have experienced trauma using an evidence-based intervention called Child Parent Psychotherapy. In La Crosse County there are two therapists, including myself, certified and rostered in CPP. In the nearby six Wisconsin counties (Jackson, Monroe, Trempealeau, Vernon, Adams, and Juneau) there is only one additional rostered CPP therapist. This shortage of therapists who have specialized in early childhood mental health means that families seeking services for their young children either need to drive very long distances or go without treatment. I currently see a three-year-old in foster care whose caregivers drive three hours round trip to meet with me. I can no longer count the number of times I have squeezed in a very young child in dire need of intervention into my schedule because I literally

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had no one else to refer them to. And I am not talking about a one-time appointment - CPP can last anywhere from six months to two or more years of regular appointments. In talking to my network of similarly trained therapists, I know I am not the only therapist that does this. This is stressful for therapists, contributes to provider burnout, and negatively impacts the sustainability of our mental health workforce.

The Social Work Compact will also greatly improve continuity of care. For individuals navigating the challenges of mental health, interruptions in treatment can be detrimental. The Interstate Compact provides a solution by allowing care to follow clients, no matter where they live, ensuring that services and progress are not interrupted. For two years I supported a first generation college student from a marginalized community and from a very rural area of Wisconsin who had recently been diagnosed with a chronic and life threatening illness. His health improved and he graduated from college. With pure grit and dedication, he was accepted into graduate school in a different state. But because of the complexities and barriers of becoming licensed in that state the best I was legally able to do for him was provide him with a list of local therapists. Had the Social Work Compact been in effect in both states I would have been able to continue to see him via telehealth and support his transition.

As a psychotherapist with 21 years of experience, I can tell you that access to licensed clinical social workers is a critical factor in preventing and addressing mental health challenges that affect the most vulnerable members of our communities. As a therapist that frequently sits with mental health and medical providers experiencing vicarious trauma and burnout, I cannot emphasize enough the high level of stress mental health providers face as a part of our job. The Social Work Interstate Compact will directly impact our ability to provide effective, timely care for Wisconsin's families, improve access to mental health services, and help alleviate the strain on our already overburdened social service system.

I urge you to support the passage of the Social Work Interstate Compact. This legislation will allow us to better serve the mental health needs of citizens. By implementing this compact, we are investing in the future of Wisconsin's mental health workforce and ensuring that every individual and family, regardless of where they live, has access to the care they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren Gourley".

Lauren Gourley, LCSW, PMH-C, IMH-E

La Crosse, WI

<https://wisconsinwatch.org/2023/02/is-there-a-shortage-of-mental-health-professionals-in-wisconsin/#:~:text=predates%20the%20pandemic-,According%20to%20data%20from%202019%2C%2052%20of%20the%20state's%2072,w%20as%2090:1.%20%3C/>