



March 13, 2024

RE: HB 2484: Written Only Proponent Testimony

Dear Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Erickson, Ranking Member Pettey, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2484, which will establish and facilitate the interstate practice compact for licensed professional social workers.

I am providing you with my written statement not only in my capacity as a licensed social worker working towards my LCSW but also drawing upon my extensive experience working with VA Benefits Administration (VBA) and serving as a 12-year Army veteran from July 2007 to July 2019, including a combat deployment where I was awarded the Purple Heart Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Combat Action Badge among many other awards. Additionally, I am the spouse of a combat veteran with multiple deployments, combat and peace deployments.

During my overseas deployment in 2010-2011, I served not only as a heavy equipment operator but also took on the role of a convoy leader, leading numerous missions across Iraq. Later, I was trained and assigned as a suicide prevention officer due to the high rates of suicide in the military. Throughout my 13-month deployment, I witnessed firsthand the enduring psychological, emotional, and physical effects of combat, motivating me to pursue a degree in social work.

Upon returning home in November 2011, I transitioned from criminal justice to social work at Pittsburg State University (PSU), commencing classes in January 2012. I earned my Bachelor of Social Work with a minor in Psychology in 2014. Subsequently, I was accepted into the University of Kansas (KU) Advanced Standing School of Social Welfare, graduating in 2015. My research at KU focused on the mental health of the military population.

Following my graduation from KU, I joined the VA Benefits Administration (VBA) in St. Paul, Minnesota, where I served on the outreach and advocacy team. My responsibilities included involvement in veterans court, outreach at homeless shelters to identify and connect veterans with VA and community resources and educating them about their benefits. Additionally, I worked with survivors of military sexual trauma, inspiring my pursuit of a PhD in Social Work

from Our Lady of the Lake University, with a research focus on survivors of sexual assault in the military.

My dissertation, titled "Experiences and Coping Mechanisms of Active-Duty Women, Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma Who Sought Mental Health Services Within the Civilian Sector: A Thematic Analysis," underscored the positive impact social workers can have on the lives of survivors. Social workers, with their diverse skill set, not only advocated for survivors but also provided guidance, resources, support, a safe space, and empowerment.

Understanding the challenges of military life, including relocation, I recognize the hurdles social workers face due to state guidelines, causing delays in obtaining employment. The passage of the Social Work Compact is crucial to improving access to care for military families, enhancing licensure portability for social workers, and addressing the shortage of mental health providers.

With great honor, I express my strong support for HB 2484, which will establish and facilitate the interstate practice compact for licensed professional social workers. The Social Work Compact is a long-term solution to the issues of licensure portability, practice across state lines, and workforce shortages in behavioral health.

Thank you for taking the time to read my statement.

Sincerely

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