

House Committee on Healthcare:

Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to provide testimony for H. 247, an act relating to Vermont's adoption of the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact.

I come to you today as a legislator, a proud representative of Chittenden 14 in Burlington, Vermont. I also come to you today as someone who trades in my power suits for a pair of scrubs when I'm not walking the halls of this statehouse. I am an occupational therapist—and a proud one at that. I have worked in the field for over a decade and currently practice at the University of Vermont Medical Center.

A lot of you may think being an occupational therapist means that I help people find jobs. Actually, that could technically fall in the scope of my profession. However, I want to take this opportunity to educate you on what occupational therapists can do and why they play such a vital role in our healthcare system.

Occupational therapists help people of all ages (“womb to tomb” as I like to say) meaningfully participate in life activities, also known as “occupations.” That means that we tailor our interventions to help people engage in activities that they want and/or need to do including taking care of themselves and their family, working, volunteering, and going to school, among many others. We provide recommendations for things including but not limited to: adaptive equipment, home safety and accessibility, caregiver and family training, cognitive tools for memory and executive functioning and returning to work, school, and leisure activities. Due to the expansive scope of our profession, we work in a variety of settings including: home health, schools, skilled nursing facilities, inpatient acute care, rehabilitation hospitals, and outpatient clinics.

I am asking for your thoughtful consideration and support of H. 247 as it affords more occupational therapists greater access to practice in this wonderful state of Vermont. I will tell you as an occupational therapist who currently holds licensure and practices in this state—we need more of us. As the majority of our state's population reaches older age and patient caseloads grow more complex, occupational therapists are needed to address the issues that are seen at the bedside as well to help prevent re-hospitalizations.

There are currently 28 states who have enacted compact legislation which is more than half of the licensing jurisdiction of our country. If enacted, this compact will allow occupational therapists and their assistants the opportunity to practice in states that have joined the Compact without having to secure a new full traditional license in each state. Said traditional process often equates to duplicative work and long wait times that create unnecessary and costly barriers for clinicians to practice.

The OT Compact before you helps break down those barriers. It preserves the regulatory authority of each compact member state to protect public health and safety through the state's existing regulatory structure. Therefore, our state's unique scope of practice will be honored.

Additionally, this is not anticipated to yield substantial additional costs. There may be a cost for additional software to connect to the Compact's data system, as well as costs associated with the attendance of Vermont's chosen Commissioner to the annual in-person OT Compact Commission meeting. However, there is no financial beneficiary of the licensure compact and it is not intended to generate profits. It is anticipated that any fees collected via setting an appropriate fee for the compact privilege will offset said administrative costs.

This was the first bill I sponsored. I spoke with legislative counsel about it only a few weeks after I was elected. I then hit the ground as soon as I was sworn in and collected the large number of signatures that you see on the list of cosponsors. Plenty of veteran legislators assured me that I didn't have to keep running around with my pen and clipboard because my sponsorship of this bill was all that would be required to get it to first reading on the floor. I didn't stop though because it's important to share just how special and needed my profession is. I am proud to be an occupational therapist and I know first hand that we should be making it easier, not harder, to allow others to practice this wonderful profession in this state that we call home. Therefore, I ask you to strongly consider passing this bill.

Thank you,
Rep. Mary-Katherine Stone
Chittenden 14
Burlington, Vermont