



Nulton Diagnostic Treatment Center

June 24, 2023

The Honorable Frank Burns
Chairman of the Licensing Board
1234 State Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Chairman Burns,

I write to you as a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, practicing for over 30 years, with extensive experience managing mental health services in Pennsylvania. As the Nulton Diagnostic and Treatment Center lead, we employ over 250 mental health professionals, including 12 psychiatrists, 12 CRNPs/PA-Cs, RNs, licensed therapists, and various other licensed and certified mental health professionals, and we serve more than 15,000 patients annually. This experience allows me to testify firsthand to the urgent need for better access to psychiatric medication, and I firmly support the proposed house bill granting prescribing privileges to properly trained psychologists in Pennsylvania.

Like much of the country, Pennsylvania is facing a growing mental health crisis. Approximately 20% of our state's residents grapple with mental illness, mirroring the national statistics. Despite the prevalence of mental illness, an alarming proportion of these individuals go untreated, primarily due to the limited number of professionals who can prescribe psychiatric medication. This has led to distressingly long waitlists for psychiatric care.

Nationally, 1 in 5 adults experiences mental illness yearly, translating to approximately 26% of Pennsylvanian adults. However, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, almost 60% of adults with a mental illness did not receive mental health services in the previous year. It is clear that our existing system is falling short of meeting the needs of our residents.

As it stands, psychiatrists are the only professionals who can prescribe these medications. It's essential to note that despite their invaluable contributions, our psychiatrist colleagues have had many years to address this growing crisis in PA but have unfortunately been unable to provide a sustainable solution. The wait times for psychiatric appointments are often unmanageably long, and access to these professionals in rural areas is particularly limited. Despite our deep respect for our psychiatrist colleagues, it's clear that the current system isn't adequate to handle the demand for mental health services.

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The proposed house bill offers a solution. By extending prescribing privileges to properly trained psychologists, we can significantly increase the number of professionals capable of providing comprehensive mental health services. This legislation has already been implemented successfully in states like New Mexico, Louisiana, and Illinois. It has been shown to improve access to treatment without compromising patient safety or care quality.

By allowing psychologists to prescribe, we can decrease wait times, make mental health services more accessible, and provide better care to those in rural and underserved communities. Naturally, there may be concerns about maintaining the standard of care, which is why ensuring that training for prescribing psychologists is rigorous and held to the highest standard is critical.

Among those opposing the granting of prescribing privileges to psychologists, a common argument is one of safety—based on the different training pathways between psychologists and psychiatrists. While it's true that training for psychiatrists and psychologists differ, I wish to underscore that psychologists undergo rigorous, in-depth training in psychopathology, diagnostics, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and other therapeutic modalities, establishing a solid foundation for understanding mental disorders.

Further, the proposed bill does not suggest granting psychologists prescribing rights overnight. The plan is for psychologists to undergo additional, intensive pharmacological training and supervised practical experience. This extra training will be equivalent to or more than what other non-physician prescribers, such as nurse practitioners or physician assistants, receive. These professionals have long been safely and effectively prescribing psychotropic medication across the United States, proving that medical school is not the only path to becoming an effective prescriber.

From this perspective, expanding the prescribing power to psychologists under such rigorous standards does not pose a threat to patient safety but instead promises to enhance the care of mental health patients by reducing wait times and improving access. However, we cannot allow potential concerns to prevent us from implementing a tangible solution to a dire problem.

In light of my professional experience and the escalating mental health crisis in Pennsylvania, I respectfully testify in favor of this house bill and urge the Licensing Board to support its implementation. This is necessary to address our state's mental health needs. Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Yours sincerely,



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