

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 308 (Delegate Costa)
Health and Government Operations

Physical Therapist Assistants - Direct Supervision

This bill prohibits a licensed physical therapist assistant from practicing limited physical therapy unless the assistant is under ongoing and direct supervision by a licensed physical therapist. “Direct supervision” means the responsibility of a licensed physical therapist to exercise on-site supervision of a physical therapy assistant.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill does not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Meaningful. Under the bill, a physical therapist assistant is no longer able to treat homecare and nursing home patients unless the supervising physical therapist is also on site. A licensed physical therapist likely has to assume all homecare responsibilities.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Physical therapy is a health specialty that plans, organizes, and administers a wide range of physiotherapeutic treatments designed to restore functional mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent disability for those suffering from a disabling injury or disease. The State Board of Physical Therapy Examiners licenses and regulates members of the profession to ensure that the public receives safe and healthful physical therapy.

A physical therapist assistant may provide limited physical therapy services under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist. Most states, including Maryland, require a physical therapist assistant to be licensed or certified. A physical therapist assistant is limited in what they do by State law and regulations. Generally, they may assist in providing physical therapy treatments after the patient has been evaluated and the plan of care has been developed by a physical therapist. A physical therapist assistant is required to follow the direction and plan of care of the supervising physical therapist.

To become a physical therapist assistant in Maryland, an applicant must graduate from a program approved by the American Physical Therapy Association and satisfactorily complete the required clinical training. Physical therapist assistant programs are generally at the associate's degree level. There are five accredited physical therapist assistant programs in the State.

A physical therapist assistant is expected to continue their professional development through continuing education courses. To maintain licensure in Maryland, a physical therapist assistant must earn two units (20 contact hours) per license renewal cycle. The board maintains a list of approved and nonapproved courses on its web site.

Over the fiscal 2008-2009 biennial license renewal period, the board issued a total 402 new physical therapist assistant licenses, while renewing licenses of 1,050 physical therapist assistants.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

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