



DATE: February 26, 2020 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Health and Environment
BILL NO: Senate Bill 763
BILL TITLE: State Board of Physicians - Genetic Counselors - Licensing
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 763 - State Board of Physicians - Genetic Counselors – Licensing.

Bill Summary:

This bill requires the State Board of Physicians to license genetic counselors and establishes the Genetic Counseling Advisory Committee within the Board. On or after October 1, 2022, an individual must be licensed by the Board prior to beginning practicing genetic counseling.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is an internationally recognized institution dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults with developmental disabilities and disorders of the brain, spinal cord and musculoskeletal system. KKI serves over 24,000 patients per year, a significant portion of whom have a genetic basis for their disability. KKI currently employs four certified genetic counselors who care for over 1,000 patients per year.

Genetic counselors are Master’s-trained healthcare professionals who have specialized education in medical genetics and counseling to provide personalized guidance to patients regarding their genetic health. KKI’s genetic counselors are vital members of the medical team, working alongside physicians, nurse practitioners, and therapists to provide comprehensive patient care. Genetic counselors play crucial roles in selection of appropriate genetic tests and interpretation of results, facilitating decision-making, as well as educating and providing emotional support to patients and their families.

Rationale:

The rapid growth of medical genetics has affected virtually all areas of medicine. Over the past decade, advances in genomic technology and research have elucidated the genetic basis of a vast array of health conditions including neurodevelopmental disorders. Research has also identified promising pathways to targeted therapeutics. Genetic counselors are vital to translating these discoveries in to clinical care and attaining the goal of precision medicine.

Genetic counselors increase the quality of genetics services while reducing costs. Genetic counseling by certified genetic counselors helps ensure appropriate genetic tests are ordered and results are both interpreted correctly and delivered in a manner that is easily understandable. Genetic counselors also reduce the frequency of inappropriate testing, such as ordering the wrong genetic tests or tests for the wrong individual, thereby delivering high quality service while lowering costs.

With increasing complexity and technological developments in genetic testing, the need for individuals to access appropriately qualified genetic service providers has become critically important.

Licensure for genetic counselors is essential to ensuring that genetic counseling providers are appropriately trained and credentialed so that patients receive proper information and care. Licensure of genetic counselors serves as a title protection to prevent untrained individuals from inappropriately attempting to provide these services and targeting vulnerable patient populations. In our opinion, lack of licensure for these highly trained professionals will directly restrict provision of essential clinical genetics services to patients and their families.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 763.