

## House Bill 259: The Patient's Access to Integrative Health Care

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### The Patient's Access to Integrative Medicine: Why Its Needed

Integrative medical approaches to diagnosis and treatment have often proven themselves to be more effective, less expensive and present less risk than conventional medical treatment. The integrative health community has made tremendous contributions to the health field although mainstream medicine has often taken decades to accept it. These contributions include the importance of diet in cancer, heart disease and numerous other illnesses; the critical role of immune system interventions in the treatment of cancer; the fact that food allergies have wide-spread health effects and ways to treat them effectively; and the importance and effectiveness of vitamins, minerals and probiotics. The [National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\)](#) at the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) support a significant number of integrative medical centers at major academic institutions around the country; most medical schools now have coursework that teaches some form of integrative methods; seventeen universities in the United States alone (including George Washington University, University of Arizona, University of Michigan, Ohio State University, and the University of Wisconsin) have fellowships in integrative medicine, and there is a substantial amount of published research around the world exploring and justifying these methods. Integrative Medicine has been recognized as a Certified Board Specialty by the [American Board of Physician Specialties](#).

However, despite its effectiveness and the professional growth and wide recognition of integrative approaches, there is still a bias by practitioners who are only trained in conventional methods and therefore unable to fairly evaluate practitioners who incorporate integrative diagnostic methods and treatments into their practices. As a result, health care providers that incorporate integrative methods have faced the possibility of unfair investigations and board sanctions for no other reason than that they are in a minority school of thought not understood or accepted by mainstream medical institutions. Often this occurs even though the practitioner is getting excellent results with integrative treatments where conventional medicine has failed, no harmful effects have been reported, no patient has complained, no incompetence has been found, and the practitioner has had the enthusiastic support from his or her patients regarding the results. Making matters worse, state board actions are often inconsistent. As a result, there is tremendous uncertainty for the integrative practitioner as to whether an approach could result in disciplinary action. This causes physicians and other practitioners to avoid offering care they know will help their patients.

#### Legislation in Other States

At least fourteen other states—including New York, California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Alaska, North Carolina, Washington State—have therefore already passed laws or regulations allowing physicians to use integrative tests and treatments. Maryland is way behind.

If we do not allow true integrative treatments that work to be properly done by trained professionals in Maryland where they will be under the jurisdiction of the boards, patients in desperation will continue to travel to other countries where they may be harmed by fraudulent treatments or try fraudulent treatments they see on the internet without the guidance of a physician.

#### The Patient's Access to Integrative Health Care Act

*The Patient's Access to Integrative Health Care Act of 2020* (formerly called The Patients' Right to Choose Act of 2020) will allow health care professionals to use integrative tests and treatments when they feel it is in the best interest of their patients as long as they fully disclose to the patient that the diagnostic test or

treatment is an integrative approach and not considered standard treatment, provide full informed consent, and the treatment poses no greater risk than conventional medicine that is not outweighed by the potential benefits. This Act, which is way overdue, allows physicians and licensed health care providers—those on the front-line of treating disease—to be clinicians and decide what is best for their patients instead of being limited by narrow, largely pharmaceutical approaches to care. It allows each patient the right to determine which treatment is best for him or her. Such a choice is the patient's right! It is his or her human right!

If passed, there would be absolutely *no cost to the State of Maryland*, and insurance considerations would not be involved since insurance does not usually cover integrative tests or treatments and integrative methods are often inexpensive. However, if passed, this Act may, in fact, help reduce health costs in Maryland because more people will be getting well!