

**Written Statement of  
Colonel (ret) James Ficke, MD**

Madam Chairperson, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about Maryland House Bill 0428 regarding Podiatrists and what's important in a name.

My name is Colonel (retired) James Ficke, and I'm an Orthopaedic Surgeon specializing in foot and ankle care. I'm currently the Chair of Orthopaedic Surgery at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. I attended Medical School here in Maryland at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. I served in the United States Army for 30 years, deploying to Iraq from 2004-2005. This coincided with a similar deployment of my friend and fellow Soldier, now United States Congressman Brad Wenstrup. He is also a Colonel and happens to be a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine. I want to amplify this point to illustrate that Congressman Wenstrup, myself, and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons worked together to bring equity to pay in the VA for Podiatrists in 2018. I had the privilege to testify to the US Congress regarding many parallels of what brings us together today, and one in particular: the notion of what constitutes a physician. The term physician is defined as a person licensed to practice medicine; a medical doctor. In fact, in 2018, the American Medical Association published on their website the Truth in Advertising Survey Results. This survey noted that 88% of patients felt that only licensed medical doctors or doctors of osteopathic medicine should be permitted to use the title "physician".

Concerning HB0428, the Orthopaedic Community strongly agrees and supports that high-quality podiatrists are an essential part of the care team and often provide excellent service to Maryland citizens. In my statement here today, I hope to emphasize that I have respected colleagues, friends and partners who are Podiatrists. I also have Doctors of Physical and Occupational Therapy, and even Doctors of Philosophy who are world renowned scientists and even Nobel Laureates. These fine people, however, are not physicians.

I have trained health care providers and physicians since 1987, over 30 years. Podiatrists and orthopaedic surgeons are trained differently. The lower extremity is one of the more complex areas of the human musculoskeletal system, and an orthopaedic surgeon will attend four years of medical school, serve a five year orthopaedic surgery residency, and typically take an additional year of subspecialty fellowship training. All MDs and DOs are trained in the nationally accredited paradigm of six core competencies including multi system clinical care and disease management, which is not the case for all podiatrists, and is a prerequisite for peer-review oversight. Specifically, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education is this oversight entity, and the United States Medical Licensing Examination and Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination are the standard pathways to become licensed as a physician.

While recent changes have improved podiatric education, it is not the same as the multi-system medical education required to become a MD or DO, nor is it subject to the same accreditation process. Podiatry does not participate in the USMLE or COMLEX, which are the standard for all licensed medical care and essential to practice as a physician in Maryland. We believe that the title of physician should be attained through the accreditation process, and not the legislative process. In fact, there is currently a unified Podiatry Task Force, with leadership of the American Podiatric Medical Association, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons and the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society who are earnestly working together, as we all can be, to reach consensus on the path to legitimizing the claim for the title of physician through formal accreditation of Podiatric Medical Schools and then accountable standardized licensing through existing National Board of Medical Examiners pathways. This Task force is working in good faith to harmonize education and accreditation and improve the care for patients provided by both orthopaedic surgeons and podiatrists. I humbly but firmly ask that the Committee not move prematurely toward legislating a name change which is not yet warranted but is being worked on the national front by our collective leaders in a responsible and forthright manner.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee and for your work on behalf of our fine state. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.