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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 691

Health Occupations – Nurse Practitioners – Certifications of Competency and Incapacity

Good afternoon, Chairman Pendergrass, Vice Chairman Pena-Melnyk and honorable members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present **HB 691 Health Occupations – Nurse Practitioners – Certifications of Competency and Incapacity**. This bill seeks to allow certified and licensed independent Nurse Practitioners to participate in the attestation to an individual's mental incapacity to make informed treatment decisions, thereby in need of guardianship, or is in a terminal or end-stage condition. There are two clarifying amendments, which when added to the Senate bill got the support of opponents. With those amendments, the cross file (SB 576) passed third reader unanimously last week.

Since 2015 we have acknowledged the high level of skill and expertise of Nurse Practitioners and we gave them the authority to practice independently. This bill extends that authority to a part of the team that makes decisions regarding mental capacity or terminal conditions. Current law requires that these decisions be made by any of the following combination of professionals who have examined or evaluated the person: two licensed physicians, or a licensed physician and a licensed psychologist or licensed clinical social worker. This bill simply adds the Nurse Practitioner to the list of second professional who can make these certifications.

Let me be clear, this bill is not intended to undermine the very challenging decisions about competency or capacity. We want to make sure that the individuals are being best served in that process. We are simply adding an additional professional who can support the process.

Nurse Practitioners with the specific training required are often the practitioners seen by patients in need of significant mental health services or those who are in terminal stages of an illness, especially in our more rural areas. It is important to know that these practitioners have the expertise needed make these informed decisions as a member of the professional team serving these patients. Their standards of practice require that they only work in the areas of specific training. At times when very difficult decisions need to be made quickly, and there are shortages of licensed providers, let us allow those with those skills and training to participate in the decision-making process.

Thank you for your consideration of this opportunity to provide better resources to our residents in need. I respectfully request a favorable report for HB 691.