



HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 1040

State Board of Physicians-Genetic Counselors-Licensing March 6, 2020

Favorable

Judette Louis, MD, President, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Matt J. Granato, MBA, LL.M., CEO, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Clark Johnson, MD MPH, Maryland State Liaison, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Andrea Desai, MD, Maryland State Liaison, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our support for House Bill 1040. The bill establishes licensure of genetic counselors in the state of Maryland. The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine supports and seeks initiatives that improve access to quality healthcare services, including genetic counseling services, in Maryland.

Founded in 1977, SMFM is the medical professional society for high-risk pregnancy specialists, supporting the clinical practice of maternal-fetal medicine by providing education, promoting research, and engaging in advocacy to optimize the health of high-risk pregnant women and their babies. Of SMFM's 4,000 members, about 300 of them are in Maryland caring for women with high-risk pregnancies.

Licensure of genetic counselors would strengthen the collaborative relationship of genetic counselors and treating physicians insofar as they will be working within a multidisciplinary setting improving access and timeliness to genetic information. Due to the nature of the high-risk pregnancy, access to multidisciplinary, collaborative care is essential, especially as genomics has increasingly becoming a vital part of patient care, with the integration of genetic counselors at every aspect of clinical care being vital. In the field of maternal-fetal medicine, we have experienced a substantial increase in the availability and diversity of genetic screening and tests that can be offered prior to and during a pregnancy. As physicians, we rely on genetic counselors to help our patients understand the genetic tests options and the meaning of the results. In addition to facilitating patient education and informed decision-making, genetic counselors play an essential role in the ordering genetic tests. Genetic counselors ensure that the appropriate genetic test is performed based on the medical indication and patient choice. This bill allows genetic counselors to order genetic tests which is important to our collaborative relationship, so that we, the physicians, can focus on the diagnosis and treatment of our patients.

Absence of licensure for genetic counselors - highly trained professionals – will directly restrict provision of strongly needed clinical genetics services to patients; a need that is ever-increasing in clinical care of pregnant women today.

We understand that there may be clarifying amendments to the legislation offered, and we would welcome the opportunity to review them. We look forward to working together in a positive manner to ensure that the intent of the legislation – to allow for licensure of genetic counselors to optimize the care of and access to genetic counseling services for pregnant women.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support legislation for genetic counselor licensure in Maryland by recommending favorably HB1040.