



16057 Tampa Palms Blvd. W, PMB #373
Tampa, FL 33647

HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
House Bill 1040
State Board of Physicians-Genetic Counselors-Licensing
March 6, 2020
Favorable
Lisa Schlager, Vice President of Public Policy

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 1040, which would establish licensure of genetic counselors in the state of Maryland.

My name is Lisa Schlager and I work for FORCE—a national nonprofit that advocates for families facing hereditary cancers. I am here on behalf of our Maryland constituents, including myself. The majority of our members carry inherited genetic mutations that significantly increase their risk of cancer. Access to trustworthy health care professionals with genetics expertise is crucial in helping members of our community make informed medical decisions.

Genetics is a complex, rapidly growing field that affects virtually every area of medicine. Quality genetic counseling services are vital as more consumers base health care decisions such as increased cancer screening or risk-reducing surgeries on genetic test results.

Most health care providers have little or no training in genetics. Genetic counselors, however, have advanced degrees in medical genetics and counseling. They are uniquely trained to provide consumers with information, education, advocacy, and emotional support for medical conditions that have genetic indications.

Last year, we filed federal complaints against several companies and individuals for engaging in unethical or fraudulent genetic counseling and testing practices. We noted that many of those providing “genetic counseling” had no genetics training and most had no health care



background. I have seen firsthand the damage done by an unqualified individual providing guidance around genetic testing.

National guidelines recommend that patients have genetic counseling before and after genetic testing. Currently, Maryland does not legally specify who may use the title of genetic counselor. Licensure is an important mechanism to help consumers and health care providers identify appropriately trained and qualified genetic counseling professionals. This will benefit patients by facilitating access to the most current, evidence-based information and care.

We strongly support this legislation and urge you to endorse genetic counselor licensure in Maryland.