



TO: Senator Clarence Lam

FROM: Maryland & DC Society of Genetic Counselors

DATE: January 21, 2021

On behalf of the Maryland and DC Society of Genetic Counselors (MDCGC), thank you for the opportunity to support **SB0034 State Board of Physicians – Genetic Counselors – Licensing**. Our organization supports proposed legislation that will improve access to quality healthcare services, including genetic counseling services, in Maryland. Our organization has worked tirelessly to secure licensure for genetic counselors in Maryland as means toward this end.

Our organization is grateful to you for introducing bill **SB0034** and is requesting your support of this bill as our elected representative.

I am a genetic counselor in Bethesda, Maryland and I am representing the MDCGC as the current president of the organization. The mission of the MDCGC is not only to provide support and continuing education to genetic counselors in the state of Maryland, but to also advocate for the genetic counseling profession in our area for our patients and to increase the public's accessibility to accurate information on genetics services and genetics information. The passing of licensure in the state of Maryland is critical in achieving these goals. As MDCGC has provided updates to our membership about the status of licensure in Maryland, there has been overwhelming support for this bill from the genetic counselors involved in our organization.

Genetic counselors are Master's-trained healthcare professionals who provide consumers with information, education, counseling, advocacy, and emotional support for medical conditions that have genetic indications. Licensure for genetic counselors is essential to ensuring that genetic counseling providers are appropriately trained and credentialed so that individuals receive proper information and care. Inappropriate genetic testing or misinterpretation of results by clinicians who lack appropriate training and have insufficient knowledge of genetic testing could lead to adverse outcomes for patients such as irreversible medical decisions, unwarranted medical tests and surveillance, or the failure to adopt life-saving measures. This is not only an adverse outcome to the patient but a financial burden to the healthcare system. Research also shows that genetic counseling helps increase patient satisfaction by ensuring that patients receive the right test the first time, with a correct interpretation of the results.

In order to ensure all Maryland residents have access to necessary medical care and appropriately trained genetics health providers, it is imperative that we increase access to genetic counselors and high quality genetic medicine in the state. Currently, there are approximately 115 genetic counselors who serve over 6 million residents in the state of Maryland. Overall, there is a shortage of genetic counselors and the lack of licensure in the state continues to limit the scope of our practice such as billing and reimbursement to hospitals for our services and the inability to practice independently. Licensure in our state would not only attract quality trained healthcare professionals to Maryland, but it would also allow for maximum flexibility in service delivery including expanding access to genetics services in rural areas through telemedicine.



Currently, Maryland does not legally specify who may use the title of genetic counselor. Licensure for genetic counselors is an important mechanism to help consumers identify appropriately qualified genetic counseling providers.

Please consider championing legislation for genetic counselor licensure in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Ashlee Vargason, MGC, CGC
Genetic Counselor, President
Maryland & DC Society of Genetic Counselors