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Senator Clarence K. Lam, MD; Miller Senate Bldg., Room 420, 11 Bladen Street, Annapolis MD 21401  
Delegate Alfred C. Carr, Jr.; House Office Bldg., Room 222, 6 Bladen Street, Annapolis MD 21401  
Delegate Steven Arentz; House Office Bldg., Room 308, 6 Bladen Street, Annapolis MD 21401

Re: S.B.34/H.B.299, the “State Board of Physicians – Genetic Counselors – Licensing.”

Dear Maryland Elected Officials,

On behalf of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine, thank you for the opportunity to support **S.B.34/H.B.299, the “State Board of Physicians – Genetic Counselors – Licensing.”** 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. We support the Maryland and DC Society of Genetic Counselors (MDCGC) efforts to secure licensure for genetic counselors in Maryland as means toward this end, specifically Senate Bill SB34.

The rapid growth of medical genetics has affected virtually all areas of medicine. This specialized expertise aids physicians, patients, and families by providing a significant role in education surrounding the genetic contributions to disease and the implications for an individual’s health – both medical and psychological – and the health of family members. In short, genetic counselors empower providers by providing genetic services and interpretation, which is vital in the goal of precision medicine. As personalized medicine and genomics become increasingly important, so does the role of the genetic counselor as a member of the care team.

Genetic counselors are Master’s-trained healthcare professionals who provide patients with information, education, counseling, advocacy, and emotional support for medical conditions that have genetic contributions. They are key members in several of our clinical care teams here at Johns Hopkins Medicine. 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. Licensure of genetic counselors serves as a title protection to prevent non-genetic counseling trained individuals from attempting to and ordering genetic tests or targeting vulnerable patient populations, such as Medicare patients or patients whose family members are suffering diseases.

Licensure would strengthen the collaborative relationship of genetic counselors and treating physicians insofar as they will be working within a multidisciplinary setting and improving access and timeliness to genetic information. As genomics is increasingly becoming a vital part of patient care, integration of genetic counselors at every aspect of clinical care will be vital, especially in obstetrics & gynecology. Approximately 3% of all pregnancies have congenital anomalies, and 1-2% of all screened couples are at risk for autosomal recessive diseases detectable by current genetic carrier screening technologies. These patients would benefit from genetic counseling services.

In our opinion, absence of licensure for these highly trained professionals--our genetic counselors-- will directly restrict provision of strongly needed clinical genetics services to patients; a need that is ever-increasing in the field of Medicine today.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask that the Committee consider championing/supporting legislation for genetic counselor licensure in Maryland by recommending favorably on **S.B.34/H.B.299, the “State Board of Physicians – Genetic Counselors – Licensing.”**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeanne S. Sheffield".

Jeanne S. Sheffield, M.D.  
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Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine