



Alvin & Lois Lapidus
Cancer Institute

January 22, 2021

Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair

Educational, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Delegate Alfred C. Carr, Jr.

Health and Government Operations Committee
222 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Support: SB0034/HB0299–State Board of Physicians–Genetic Counselors–Licensing

LifeBridge Health’s mission is to “improve the health of the individuals and communities we serve through compassionate, high quality care.” Given this, our organization strives to support initiatives that improve access to quality healthcare services, including genetic counseling, in the state of Maryland. Currently, Maryland does not legally specify who may use the title of “genetic counselor.” Licensure is an important mechanism to help consumers appropriately identify qualified genetic counseling providers and prevent unqualified individuals from targeting vulnerable patient populations and their families. As a reflection of their increasingly important functions in providing education and care for patients receiving genetic testing, 29 states currently mandate licensure of genetic counselors, with this number increasing each year. On behalf of the Alvin and Lois Lapidus Cancer Institute of LifeBridge Health, write to support licensure of genetic counselors in the state of Maryland.

The rapid growth of medical genetics has affected virtually all areas of medicine. This specialized area of medicine aides 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. Genetic counselors enable beneficiaries and other providers to consider which genetic tests may be appropriate and how to evaluate test results. In short, genetic counselors enable both patients and providers to make informed and accurate healthcare decisions. As this form of personalized medicine becomes increasingly important given the vast and rapidly increasing contributions of genetic research to medicine, so does the role of the genetic counselor in the continuum of care we provide our patients.

Genetic counselors are Master’s-trained health care professionals, who provide consumers with information, education, counseling, advocacy, and the emotional support necessary for understanding the genetic contribution to a wide variety of medical conditions to patients and their families. Licensure for genetic counselors will ensure that genetic counseling providers are appropriately trained and credentialed. In the absence of licensure, patients are at risk for receiving inaccurate information, improper care, that may lead to uninformed or misinformed choices regarding their care and the selection and interpretation of genetic testing.

Licensure will strengthen and formalize the collaborative relationship of genetic counselors and treating physicians as they work within a multidisciplinary clinical setting and will improve access and timeliness to accurate and well-informed genetic information. Our genetic counselor is a key member of our multi-disciplinary oncology team at LifeBridge Health.

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As genetics and genomics is increasingly becoming a vital part of patient care, integration of genetic counselors at every aspect of clinical care is vital. In our opinion, absence of licensure for these highly trained professionals—our genetic counselors—will restrict provision of strongly needed clinical genetics services to patients; a need that is ever-increasing in today's medicine. Specifically, in oncology it is estimated that approximately 1 in 10 cancer patients carry a high-risk gene alteration that can be crucial information for their care, as well as providing risk-reducing information for their family members.

For all these reasons, we respectfully and enthusiastically support licensure for genetic counselors in Maryland by recommending favorably on SB0034/HB0299.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanette Linder, MD".

Jeanette Linder, MD
Medical Director, LBH Oncology Service Line
Medical Director, The Alvin & Lois Lapidus Cancer Institute
Chief, The Weinman Family Department of Radiation Oncology

Joanne McAuliffe, DNP, RN, OCN, NEA-BC
Executive Director, Oncology Services
Sinai Hospital of Baltimore