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

January 24, 2021

Dear Maryland Elected Officials,

On behalf of Greater Baltimore Medical Center, 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. As the Director of Clinical Genetics at a prominent private hospital, and as the Chair of the growing Baltimore-Washington Genetics Group, I strongly support the efforts of the Maryland and DC Society of Genetic Counselors to secure licensure for genetic counselors in Maryland State as a means toward this end, specifically Senate Bill SB34.

The rapid growth of medical genetics and genomics has affected virtually all areas of medicine. This specialized area of 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. Genetic counselors are the mainstay of this effort! 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.

Maryland has been at the forefront of genetics as well as genetic counseling education since the birth of medical genetics as a field. It holds two genetic counseling training graduate programs to train future genetic counselors. 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 at our major institutions, including Johns Hopkins Hospital and the University of Maryland Medical System, as well as present in most private hospitals in Baltimore, outside Washington, DC, and in much of the state.

The benefits of genetic counseling are numerous, including an improvement in patient knowledge, a more accurate perception of genetic health risks, better psychosocial outcomes (such as lower anxiety), and an improvement in risk-reducing behaviors. There is also an economic benefit to genetic counseling. Many laboratories run genetic testing that can be extremely costly, more so if the correct test is not run or if too many unnecessary tests are run. A number of laboratories providing cancer genetic testing require a genetic counselor prior to agreeing to run the test. Genetic counselors help to reduce the number of unnecessary and costly genetic tests ordered, by working as part of a healthcare team to appropriately assess which test is the most appropriate. They are also specially trained to discuss the risks, benefits and limitations of genetic testing with the patients. With an adequate number of trained genetic counselors providing these services, additional decreased costs may continue to be realized by the health care system.

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 working within a multidisciplinary setting, and improving access and timeliness to genetic information.

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 all of the fields of Medicine today.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Antonie D. Kline'.

Antonie D. Kline, M.D.
Director of Clinical Genetics
Chair, Baltimore-Washington Genetics Group