



March 13, 2023

The Honorable Melony Griffith
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Oppose - Senate Bill 674: Physician Assistant Modernization Act of 2023

Dear Chair Griffith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those who have a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS oppose Senate Bill 674: Physician Assistants - Revisions (Physician Assistant Modernization Act of 2023) (SB 674). Physician assistants (PAs) and physicians are two distinct healthcare professions with different training, education, and levels of authority. While PAs are highly skilled and trained healthcare professionals who can perform many of the same tasks as physicians, they do not have the same authority as physicians for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, physicians have undergone extensive medical training that spans several years beyond that of PAs, including four years of medical school and a residency program that can take anywhere from three to seven years. In contrast, PAs typically complete a two-year master's degree program, which is shorter and less rigorous than the training of physicians. Secondly, physicians have more responsibility and liability than PAs because they are ultimately responsible for the care of their patients, including making final medical decisions, prescribing medications, and performing complex medical procedures. This level of responsibility requires the in-depth knowledge and experience that physicians have acquired through their extensive training.

Collaborative practice between physicians and PAs is a hallmark of modern healthcare, as it ensures that patients receive high-quality care from a team of healthcare professionals with complementary skills and expertise.



MPS/WPS are most concerned about SB 674's willingness to give PA's the ability to certify individuals for involuntary commitment. Many of our members, who have been practicing for decades, have never seen a PA work in psychiatry. This is in stark contrast to psychiatric nurse practitioners and even certified social workers – clinicians and licensed clinical professional counselors, who regularly practice in this space. Certifying an individual for involuntary commitment is a serious responsibility that involves making significant decisions regarding the individual's civil liberties and rights. Involuntary commitment requires a comprehensive assessment of the individual's somatic and mental health, including their psychiatric history, current symptoms, and risk of harm to themselves or others. Ensuring that those making decisions regarding involuntary commitment have the necessary training, knowledge, and experience is vital in making informed decisions in the patient's best interest.

For those reasons, MPS/WPS asks this committee for an unfavorable report on SB 674. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Joint Legislative Action Committee
of the Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society