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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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**Testimony in Support of HB 867
State Board of Physicians - Naturopathic Doctors
- Prescriptive Authority and Administration**

Good afternoon, Madame Chair Peña-Melnyk, and honorable members of the Health and Government Operations committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present **HB 867 - State Board of Physicians - Naturopathic Doctors - Prescriptive Authority and Administration**.

I am pleased today to present *HB 867 – State Board of Physicians – Naturopathic Doctors – Prescriptive Authority and Administration*, and I ask this Committee for a favorable vote. I am proud to serve on the House Health and Government Operations Committee because we are a committee with a mission. Our goal is to improve health outcomes in all Maryland communities through ensuring we have an effective, efficient, and integrated healthcare system. With the bill before you today, the Committee has the opportunity to advance the work we began in 2014 with passage of the original bill, HB 402 sponsored by Delegate Nat Oaks, that established licensure for naturopathic doctors. Now in Maryland, naturopathic medicine is part of the continuum of healthcare services provided by our healthcare system.

As you will hear today, our work is not quite finished. Naturopathic medicine can be transformative for the lives of Marylanders seeking treatment for the root causes of their health conditions. However, Maryland law is impeding the care of patients. Our law does not recognize that naturopathic doctors have the education and training to prescribe medications as part of their holistic treatment. Many people seek naturopathic medical care because they want to improve their overall health as well as address an underlying health condition. Naturopathic doctors have a full range of healthcare services they can provide, and prescription medication is one of the options, but not in Maryland. I am seeking to change that with HB 867 which recognizes that prescriptive authority is within the scope of naturopathic medicine.

The bill provides for prescriptive authority for naturopathic doctors for legend and Schedule III through V drugs. The bill eliminates the formulary framework to alleviate administrative burden on the Board of Physicians. The bill also provides some clarifying language regarding dispensing and administering natural substances.

I would like to tell the story about the origin of HB 867 with some background numbers:

- **Nearly 10 Years of Safe Practice in Maryland:** Through the Board of Physicians, naturopathic doctors have been licensed for nearly 10 years in Maryland. The Board reports that naturopathic doctors have nearly no disciplinary issues, demonstrating a very safe track record.
- **24 States License Naturopathic Doctors, with 14 States Recognizing Their Prescriptive Authority.** Over half of the states (including the District of Columbia) that licensure naturopathic doctors provide prescriptive authority in their laws. Maryland is behind other jurisdictions in recognizing the full benefit of naturopathic medicine for our residents.
- **141.5 Hours in Didactic Pharmacological Education.** Naturopathic doctors go to four-year medical graduate programs. They must successfully complete 141.5 didactic hours in pharmacological education and at least 1,200 hours in supervised clinical practice. You may hear from opponents that naturopathic doctors do not have sufficient education, and I would ask the Committee to look at the facts.
- **4 Medications can be Prescribed in Maryland by Naturopathic Doctors.** Maryland law allows naturopathic doctors to prescribe four kinds of prescription medication – diaphragms, cervical caps, oxygen, and epinephrine. I am not sure what percentage of Marylanders could have their healthcare needs by these medications, but it's safe to assume that this list is too limited to help nearly anyone.
- **0 Disciplinary Actions for Naturopathic Doctors for Prescribing in Most States.** According to the Federation of Naturopathic Medicine Regulatory Authorities, most states that recognize prescribing rights for naturopathic doctors have 0 disciplinary actions for prescribing. These states are Hawaii, Idaho, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Utah, Vermont, and Montana. There are several other states with very high numbers of naturopathic doctors that report between an average of 0.1 to 2.1 disciplinary actions a year related to prescribing. These states are California, Oregon, Arizona, and Washington states. Their small number of cases primarily reflect opioid prescribing issues, and we would see similar issues for any type of health professional with prescribing authority.
- **170 Letters of Support for House Bill 867 from Marylanders.** We have received 170 letters of support for HB 867 from physicians, other health professionals, naturopathic doctors, and, most importantly patients, from across Maryland.
- **Only 63 Naturopaths in Maryland today – after almost 10 years of licensure.** After nearly 10 years of licensure, there are only 63 licensed naturopathic doctors in Maryland. There are about 8,000 naturopathic doctors nationwide. Naturopathic doctors do not want to practice in Maryland because of the restriction on prescribing. My panel will speak to this issue from their own personal experience; but in essence, naturopathic doctors only practice in Maryland if their families are from Maryland. Other naturopathic doctors will not move to Maryland.

In closing, I am sponsoring this bill because I believe we are missing thousands of opportunities to ensure Marylanders to access seamless healthcare services. We will hear from some naturopathic doctors today. Each of these clinicians treats Maryland patients; and each and everyday, their patients must navigate the complex healthcare system if they need a new medication or an adjustment to their existing prescriptions. Usually, they have to wait a long time for an appointment – sometimes even months. Sometimes this is an inconvenience, but other times, this wait causes actual harm to patients.

This Committee spends a great deal of time in addressing complex, multi-faceted problems with healthcare access. However, improving access to care for patients of naturopathic doctors is actually very simple. We just need to change Maryland's law to recognize the education and experience of naturopathic doctors in prescribing.

I look forward to working with the Committee on HB 867.