

Members of the House Committee on Health Care and the Vermont General Assembly-

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the state of our Workforce, on behalf of Physician Assistants. Unfortunately, I am unable to be in attendance today, so I will provide my testimony in writing.

My name is Luc Dupuis, and I am a native Vermonter, born and raised in the small town of Irasburg. I completed my undergraduate education at the University of Vermont, followed by a Master's of Science in Physician Assistant Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. After completing this program, I immediately returned to Vermont to practice medicine. In 2012, I joined the Orthopedic Surgery team at Porter Medical Center in Middlebury, VT. In 2017, I changed specialties and began work in the Emergency Department at the University of Vermont Medical Center. Most recently, as of August of 2021, I was hired as the Director of Quality, Safety and Performance Improvement, serving on the senior leadership team, at Porter Medical Center. Since 2017, I have also served on the board of the Physician Assistant Academy of Vermont, as a Member-at-Large, Social Media Coordinator, and most recently Legislative Liaison. I was fortunate to be part of the PA team that brought S.128 PA Practice Modernization Bill into law in 2020.

The current state of the PA workforce consists of approximately 360+ individuals, of which, 63% are female and 65% practice in rural areas. Additionally, 30% of PAs practice in primary care and 50% in the hospital setting, with each PA providing around 100 patient visits per week. Physician Assistants continue to be one of the top ranked and fastest growing professions in the nation, resulting in local growth of approximately 25 PAs per year in the state, over the last decade.

This growth has occurred, despite the fact that there is currently no Physician Assistant education program in the state of Vermont. The closest program for Vermonters to attend is Franklin Pierce University, in West Lebanon, NH. All other neighboring states have multiple PA programs. In fact, Vermont is one of only three continental states that does not have a PA program. This has created considerable challenges in developing a pipeline from education to practice. Pre-PA students have little to no established pathways for shadowing or connecting with practicing PAs in a formal manner. Many are only able to learn about the profession through word of mouth, or a family friend. Any young professional interested in becoming a PA, must move out of state to receive that education. As we know, most young adults never return, as they often receive employment offers where they attended their program. The majority of PAs that currently practice in Vermont, do so due to a strong connection to the state. This is typically due to previously living in Vermont, having elderly parents living here, and/or a partner with a connection to the state. In the absence of an anchoring educational program, this is not a sustainable model for supporting, never mind growing the profession.

Vermont faces substantial challenges in its effort to recruit and retain Physician Assistants, besides the aforementioned lack of a PA program. Cost is the next greatest factor, whether it is education, wages, housing, or childcare. PA Programs typically cost over \$80,000 dollars in tuition alone. Because it is an advanced degree, there are few opportunities for scholarships, grants, or even loan repayment programs to help offset the cost. Vermonters also never have the opportunity to qualify for "in-state tuition," further placing a premium price on this education. Upon graduating, even if a PA student has a strong desire to return to work in the state, they find considerably lower salaries, often as much as 20% less than neighboring states. This is further compounded by the lack of affordable housing. It is no secret that affordable homes are few and far between, even for those earning a professional wage. Finally, as a father of a toddler and preschooler, I can offer personal experience around the challenges of

securing childcare. Not only is it unaffordable for working families, it is also a scarce resource. The lack of affordability and availability of childcare has caused many PAs to reduce their hours, or leave the profession or state altogether, to care for their children.

Fortunately, Vermont has been thoughtful in the last couple of years, in developing an extremely valuable tool, through the advancement of S.128 PA Practice Modernization Bill in 2020. The passing of this bill has the potential to secure and grow the PA workforce, as it positioned Vermont to have some of the most modern PA practice law in the country. Because practice law can vary significantly from state to state, Vermont has set itself up to become a highly desirable state for employment. The impact of this law has and will continue to be instrumental in allowing PAs to practice at the top of their training and experience, and reduce barriers to obtaining licensure.

It is no secret that the pandemic has put tremendous strain on our healthcare systems. It is critical that the state legislature act to stabilize the healthcare workforce, including PAs. To do so, the legislature must address growing health profession educational opportunities in the state, including the development of a PA program. Additionally, it is critical that we provide opportunities to reduce or offset the cost of education, through scholarships, grants, and loan repayment programs. We should also offer financial incentives for PAs to live and practice in Vermont, to offset the cost of living and lower wages. Finally, it is imperative that we support improving access and affordability of childcare, to allow working parents to remain working parents. Especially considering the disproportionate impact that this has on our predominantly female profession.

I appreciate the time and effort that these members have committed to developing solutions for our healthcare workforce challenges, and allowing me to provide some perspective from the Physician Assistant profession.

With Gratitude,
Luc H. Dupuis, MS, PA-C