



TO: House Health Care Committee

FROM: Liz Couto, BSN, RN, CEN, Chair, Director, ENA-Vermont

RE: Testimony re: H. 573 An act relating to the first certification of an emergency examination

Date: Wednesday, February 18, 2026

Dear House Health Care Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H. 573 and thank you Representative Berbeco for sponsoring and shepherding this bill for improved, timely access to care for patients in emergency crisis.

Title 18: Chapter 179, section (f) of 7505. Warrant and certificate for emergency examination of Vermont State Statutes outlines ‘a person transported pursuant to subsection (d) of this section shall be evaluated as soon as possible after arrival at the hospital. Expanding the definition of “health care professional” to include licensed Physician assistances, as outlined in H. 573 would ensure that patients are evaluated as soon as possible as physician assistants serve as core, and in some organizations the only scheduled, provider staff in Emergency Departments.

Currently, there are many times when access to care is delayed for this population of patients, as a physician is not consistently scheduled or available, therefore actually delaying their care in the only setting, Emergency Departments, where patients needing Emergency Evaluation can get access to inpatient care.

Licensed Physician Assistants would undergo the same certification process, as mandated by the Department of Mental Health as physicians and APRNs for certification to complete first certifications. This standard process would ensure that all providers completing these evaluations are held to the same standards of care and expectations for these assessments.

Scope of practice for the providers, Emergency Departments, and/or “participating hospitals” under contract with the department of mental health for inpatient placement does not change; this change in definition for “health care professional” assures that current staffing models for providers in Vermont Emergency Departments, including physician assistants, actually aligns with the expectations that **all** patients have, diagnosis excluded, the right to be evaluated as soon as possible for emergency conditions, under EMTALA, as we are licensed and trained to do for our patients.

Respectfully and with pleasure,

Liz Couto