

Dear Senator Hardy and Senator Lyons,

As a doctorate prepared adult nurse practitioner with 4 decades of experience in Vermont's health care system, I am writing to express my strong support for H.237, which grants prescriptive authority to appropriately trained doctoral-level psychologists. I understand this has crossed over to the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. Working in Primary Care and Addiction medicine, I see daily how the shortage of mental health prescribers affects Vermonters. This delay in care is caused by inability to access primary care compounded by a severe shortage of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners. Many of my patients have waited months for initial psychiatric medication evaluations, with some traveling hours to receive care. Those who have access to primary care can wait months for an appointment and can be limited to a rushed 15 minute visit for a prescription refill without the critical mental health counseling that would be provided by a psychologist. Primary care providers often need to consult with or refer to a psychologist or psychiatrist when the behavioral and mental health issues are too complex for a PCP visit. These delays have significantly impacted Vermonters' mental health outcomes and overall well-being. These delays result too often in costly emergency room admissions, loss of jobs for under and untreated patients, poor grades and disruptions in higher education, disruptions in both family systems and home life.

Currently Counseling Services of Addison County (CSAC) is losing a psychiatrist and a Psych Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. Their patients who are being treated with psych medications are now at risk of having their refill significantly delayed as the primary care providers often do not feel comfortable picking up those prescriptions especially when they are controlled substances such as benzodiazepines. I know of 1 patient currently who was told he needed to find his own psych med prescriber as they, CSAC, are unable to provide a replacement at this time. He is frightened and worried about relapsing into suicidal ideation and severe depression.

Seven states have already implemented prescriptive authority for psychologists who successfully complete post-doctoral clinical psychopharmacology training. Their specialized psychological training and additional pharmacology education make them uniquely qualified to provide comprehensive mental healthcare. I urge you to support legislation granting prescriptive authority to trained psychologists. This policy change would help address our critical provider shortage while maintaining high standards of care for Vermonters struggling with mental health challenges. Please share this with the rest of your committee, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Deborah Wachtel, DNP, MPH, APRN
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