

March 28, 2025

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

I am writing to urge your support for H. 237 that would increase access to comprehensive mental health services across Vermont.

Our state, like many in the nation, faces a critical mental health care shortage. Allowing doctoral-level psychologists to prescribe medication would significantly improve access to essential mental health services, particularly in our rural communities where psychiatric providers are scarce.

A recent article published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, employed a simulated statistical model which found that **Vermont was one of the states that would see the largest reduction in prescriber shortages.** [Here is a link to that article.](#) I would be happy to send a pdf if that would be helpful.

Below is a quotation from the research:

“At the maximum of 15% of psychologists becoming prescribers....[several states listed] and Vermont (10.2%) all had relative reductions of 10% or greater” (p. 143).

As a licensed psychologist, I have seen mental health treatment change lives for the better—not only for the patient, but for all those touched by the patient’s life, including their families, workplace colleagues, and the wider community. I also know the devastating effects of untreated mental illness and suicide, having witnessed the associated pain and suffering within my own circle of friends and loved ones.

Psychotherapy makes a huge difference for a lot of patients, but for some, medication is needed to promote full functioning. We also see situations where individuals have been treated within the current mental health system, and have been prescribed numerous medications that are no longer necessary. Helping patients transition off unhelpful prescriptions or enabling them to take advantage of new medications that can replace older, less effective ones is also a way psychologists licensed to prescribe could make a difference.

Doctoral-level psychologists already have extensive training in diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions. H.237 provides rigorous additional requirements: completion of an accredited postdoctoral training program in

psychopharmacology, two years of supervised clinical practice, and passing a national certification exam.

Patient safety is paramount in this bill. It includes thoughtful guardrails through required collaborative agreements with physicians, exclusions for vulnerable populations (children, elderly, and pregnant patients), and limitations on the types of medications that can be prescribed.

Seven states have already successfully implemented similar legislation, demonstrating both safety and effectiveness. Let's join them in modernizing our mental health care system to better serve Vermonters who desperately need improved access to comprehensive mental health treatment.

Please let me know if I can provide additional information. Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Hastings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a stylized "H".

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