

February 4, 2026

Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here to support H. 237 granting prescriptive authority to appropriately trained doctoral-level psychologists to address mental health care access in Vermont.

Across our state, patients are waiting weeks or months to see psychiatric prescribers. In many communities, there simply are none. Yet psychologists—doctoral-level providers with extensive training in mental health assessment and treatment—are already present, often serving as the primary point of care. Prescriptive authority allows us to use this *existing workforce* more effectively and reduce unnecessary barriers to treatment.

Psychologists receive the most comprehensive education of any mental health profession in diagnosis, psychopathology, and evidence-based treatment, and prescriptive authority for psychologists has been implemented successfully in multiple states, as well as within the Department of Defense and the Indian Health Service. The outcome data consistently show safe prescribing practices, no increase in adverse events, and high levels of collaboration with physicians.

Prescriptive authority also improves continuity of care. When psychotherapy and medication management are provided by the same clinician, treatment decisions are better informed by extensive knowledge of the patient over time. This reduces missed referrals and overreliance on medication alone. It is cost-effective, decreasing emergency room visits and unnecessary hospitalizations.

Psychologists bring a particularly important perspective to prescribing. Our training emphasizes that medication is **one tool among many**—not the default solution. This leads to the thoughtful use of medications and attention to psychosocial and environmental factors.

This proposed legislation does not replace physicians or psychiatrists, nor does it diminish the importance of medical expertise. Prescribing psychologists practice within clearly defined scopes and collaborative care models, consulting and referring when medical complexity exceeds our role. This approach allows physicians to focus on the most medically complex cases, while improving access for everyone else.

Finally, strong safeguards have been written directly into the bill—advanced training requirements and supervised practice-- ensuring that prescriptive authority is granted responsibly and with patient safety as the highest priority.

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, and for some, medication is needed to promote full functioning. Granting prescriptive authority to properly trained psychologists is a practical, evidence-based solution to Vermonters' mental health needs. It expands access, improves continuity of care, and protects public safety—while making better use of the mental health professionals already serving our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Hastings". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the "g".

Sarah Hastings, Ph.D.
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Graduate Psychology Program Director,
Saint Michael's College