

March 4, 2024

Representative Kristin Bahner
525 State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Senator John Hoffman
MN Senate Building, Rm. 2111
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Bahner and Senator Hoffman:

We are writing to express our appreciation for your introduction of HF 3494/SF 4124, legislation that will help us better serve patients with mental illness.

One in five Minnesotans will need mental health care this year. Unfortunately, only 27% of them will get the care they need. According to the Health Resources & Services Administration, 80% of Minnesota counties qualify as mental health professional shortage areas. The federal Department of Health and Human Services projects that the United States will face a deficit of 31,000 psychiatrists over the next five years and 2024 is projected to be the worst year for access to psychiatric care.

Physician assistants (PAs) are well-trained providers who help to expand access to care in all settings and specialties, including mental health and are proven to provide high-quality, safe, and timely care. They are licensed and regulated by the Board of Medical Practice, which supports this legislation's regulatory language improvement. PAs practice under a specialty-focused practice agreement that is reviewed annually by a Minnesota licensed physician, which is maintained in HF 3494/SF 4124.

The current PA practice regulation, MN Stat. section 147A, subd. 5, is an additional clause specifying that PAs provide care for adults and children with mental illness. In practice, this clause has:

- Created a point of confusion for health systems and clinics about the role PAs can and already do play in mental health care delivery.
- Created staffing and employment challenges in the most critically understaffed area of medicine due to confusion regarding what collaboration is required beyond the practice agreement and what ongoing care means for regulation of practice.
- Created redundant language to the PA practice agreement which already reflects the PA scope of practice and is reviewed annually by MN licensed physician.

We are called to make a healthy difference in people's lives.

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PAs are already classified as mental health providers in federal rules and regulations. In fact, the 21st Century Cures Act – a federal health reform policy passed in 2016 – defines PAs as “high-need providers in mental health.” Meanwhile, federal statutes authorize PAs to lead care teams within Community Mental Health Centers. Updating state statutes to permit PAs the privileges they already enjoy within federal programs will help alleviate the access challenges so many Minnesotans face today.

HF 3494/SF 4124 is a commonsense fix to state statutes that will allow us to leverage our team of providers better to serve the mental health needs of our patients. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



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