

February 2, 2021

To the House Committee on Health,

I am writing to provide my comments *in support of the proposed House Bill 2619* to allow for genetic counselor licensure.

I am a nurse practitioner and have been working in the field of clinical genetics since 2012, initially in the Washington, D.C. region and now in Portland where I serve as the Program Director for Clinical Metabolic Genetics at a major academic health center. I have also served as the Public Issues Co-Chair for the Society for Inherited Metabolic Disorders (SIMD) since September 2019. I have had consistent collaboration with genetic counselor colleagues in a variety of settings throughout my career and know first-hand the significant impact they make on clinical bandwidth, patient satisfaction and outcomes.

Genetics departments nation-wide are struggling with a lack of trained providers to care for a growing population of patients, many with highly complex and acute needs. Wait times for appointments can be as long as a year (or longer!) and geographic access to genetic services including genetic counseling is limited. The gap in available providers is seen at all levels including nurses and physicians. Genetic counselors help to minimize the gap and meet the needs of these patients as well as the providers they work with. However, a major challenge for the field is the lack of reimbursement for genetic counseling services in general, in part resulting from lack of recognition which starts with inability to obtain state licensure. Nowhere is this gap more significant than in rural settings like many of those across Oregon.

We have seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic actions at the Federal, state, and local levels to allow all healthcare providers to contribute by an ability to practice at the top of their scope. Given the national shortage of medical professionals competent to provide genetics services, I applaud efforts to take the important step of modernizing regulations to enable genetic counselors to practice to the fullest extent of their education and clinical preparation. I believe this legislation creates the opportunity to significantly improve patient access to models of genetics care designed to meet the needs of families and individuals and to enable the state to more fully utilize its available resources to meet those needs. The state and the field would benefit greatly from allowing these Masters-prepared and highly qualified health care team members to seek licensure.

If I can be of any assistance to the committee or its staff, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Viall, MSN, PPCNP-BC

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