

House Bill 1040 – State Board of Physicians – Genetic Counselors – Licensing

Anne Arundel Medical Center of Luminis Health supports and seeks initiatives that improve access to quality healthcare services – including genetic counseling services – in Maryland. At present, Maryland does not legally specify who may use the title of genetic counselor. Licensure for genetic counselors is an important mechanism to help consumers identify appropriately qualified genetic counseling providers. We support the Maryland and DC Society of Genetic Counselors (MDCGC) efforts to secure licensure for genetic counselors in Maryland as means toward this end, specifically House Bill 1040.

The rapid growth of medical genetics has affected virtually all areas of medicine. This specialized expertise aids physicians, patients, and families by providing a significant role in education surrounding the genetic contributions to disease and the implications for an individual's health – both medical and psychological – and the health of family members. Highly trained professionals, genetic counselors enable beneficiaries and other providers to consider which genetic tests may be appropriate and how to evaluate test results. In short, genetic counselors empower providers by offering a more thorough overview of possible disease pathways, and thereby aiding patients to make informed decisions. As personalized medicine and cancer genomics become increasingly important given the vast array of research findings available, so does the role of the genetic counselor as an integral member of the care team.

Genetic counselors are Master's-trained healthcare professionals who provide consumers with information, education, counseling, advocacy, and emotional support for medical conditions that have genetic indications. They are key members in several of our clinical care teams here at Anne Arundel Medical Center. Licensure for genetic counselors is essential to ensuring that these providers are appropriately trained and credentialed. This guarantees our patients receive proper information and care. Licensure of genetic counselors serves as a title protection to prevent non-genetic counseling trained individuals from attempting to and ordering genetic tests or targeting vulnerable patient populations, such as Medicare patients or patients whose family members are suffering diseases.

Licensure would strengthen the symbiotic relationship of genetic counselors and treating physicians insofar as they will be working in a multidisciplinary setting and improving access as well as timeliness to genetic information. Genomics has been highlighted as a vital part of patient care, as such, integration of genetic counselors in every stage of clinical care is vital. We work toward improving population health, genetics, genetic testing, and appropriate management as they offer a consequential opportunity to influence the betterment of health.

It is our belief that the absence of licensure for these highly trained professionals – our genetic counselors – will directly restrict provision of strongly needed clinical genetics services to patients; a need that is ever-increasing in Medicine today.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask that the Committee consider championing/supporting legislation for genetic counselor licensure in Maryland by recommending favorably HB 1040.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sherry Perkins', written in a cursive style.

Sherry Perkins, PhD, RN, FAAN
President