

Genetic Counselor Licensure: Letter of Support for Amended Bill

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Sarah Spinette PhD, MS, CGC
Genetic Counselor in the state of RI
112 11th Street
Providence, RI 02906

I write to express my support for initiatives that will improve access to quality healthcare services, including genetic counseling services, in RI. I am in full support of the Bill #H6643 which has been submitted by John Richardson, Director, Policy and Government Relations, National Society of Genetic Counselors.

The rapid growth of medical genetics has affected virtually all areas of medicine. Providing quality genetic counseling services has become increasingly critical, as more consumers base healthcare decisions on genetic-risk factors and genetic test results.

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. Licensure for genetic counselors is essential to ensuring that genetic counseling providers are appropriately trained and credentialed so that individuals receive proper information and care.

Currently, RI does not legally specify who may use the title of genetic counselor. Licensure for genetic counselors is an important mechanism the help consumers identify appropriately qualified genetic counseling providers. Inappropriate genetic testing or misinterpretation of results by clinicians who lack appropriate training and have insufficient knowledge of genetic testing could lead to adverse outcomes for patients such as irreversible medical decisions, unwarranted medical tests and surveillance, or the failure to adopt life-saving measures. This is not only an adverse outcome to the patient but a financial burden to the healthcare system. **In my personal experience, I have counseled patients who have been inadvertently:**

- 1. Misinformed about their genetic risk due to misinterpretation of genetic test results,**
- 2. Improperly diagnosed,**
- 3. Required a second genetic test due to improper test selection,**
- 4. Promised an inaccurate outcome from genetic testing.**

Research also shows that genetic counseling helps increase patient satisfaction by ensuring that patients receive the right test the first time, with a correct interpretation of the results.

In order to ensure all RI residents have access to necessary medical care and appropriately trained genetics health providers, it is imperative that we increase access to genetic counselors and high quality genetic medicine in the state. Currently, the wait time for appointments with genetics is excessive and the lack of licensure in the state continues to limit the scope of our practice such as billing and reimbursement to hospitals for our services and the inability to practice independently. Licensure in our state would not

only attract quality trained healthcare professionals to RI, but it would also allow for maximum flexibility in service delivery including expanding access to genetics services in rural areas through telemedicine. This past year we witnessed the value of telemedicine to our patients and our practice. There were fewer cancellations and decreased no show rate. In addition, licensure would allow physicians in private practice to refer directly to genetic counselors, including those that work independently. Currently, RI 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. Please consider championing legislation for genetic counselor licensure in RI.

Sincerely,

Sarah Spinette PhD, MS CGC