

Senate Health and Human Services Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 31, 2026

Re: Testimony in Opposition of Senate bill 2859, titled AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

Dear Chairperson Murray and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

I am Thomas Meehan, PhD, PA-C from Barrington and Senate District 32. I am also the Program Director for the Physician Assistant Program at Johnson & Wales University which became the first University in Rhode Island to offer a PA program 12 years ago.

I Oppose Senate bill 2859, titled AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -
- PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS


I oppose bill 2859 because...

- While the intention of the bill is for reimbursement, it would create a precedent for specialty licensure. This is something that MDs and NPs do not have.
- Rhode Island would be the first state to require a specialty license for PAs leading to a reduction in PAs practicing in behavioral health and not an increase.
- As a PA educator, I can assure you that PA students receive substantial education in behavioral health including completing a required clinical rotation. At the end of their education, a PA is practice ready but does need the collaboration contained in the PA statute to fully grow in their practice.
- Less than 10% of PAs nationally have the certificate of added qualification (CAQ) and of those with it in psychiatry are even smaller. In addition to creating a dangerous landscape for other PAs, the bill is also significantly flawed and would drive PAs wanting to practice in psychiatry out of the state.
- The bill is additionally flawed in the following way, in order to get a CAQ in psychiatry, you need 3 years in a specialty. But in order to get this new license, you need a CAQ. So, a PA wanting to practice in psychiatry would need to leave the state to get the experience needed to get the CAQ.
- Finally, requiring a specialty license in order for insurance reimbursement is not the appropriate method.

This bill would restrict PA practice and reduce access to healthcare for Rhode Islanders at a time when behavioral health needs are at an all time high.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in opposition of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Th PM', with a stylized, cursive script.

Thomas Meehan, PhD, PA-C

126 County Rd
Barrington, RI 02806
Senate District 32