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Senate Bill to Strengthen Mental Health Access in Michigan

NPs, CNSs and PAs treating mental health across Michigan

Lansing, MI, March 12, 2020 —Senate Bill 826 was introduced this week, Tuesday, March 10th to update the Mental Health Code by including Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) and Physician Assistants (PAs) as Mental Health Professionals. The bill is sponsored by the Senate Health & Human Services (HHS) Committee Chair Curt VanderWall (R-Ludington). The bill was cosponsored by every Senate HHS Committee member.

NPs, CNSs and PAs are educated and trained to provide behavioral and mental health care. Michigan's Mental Health Code does not list these professions, leaving out thousands of frontline providers. The very law designed to protect patients does not recognize the mental healthcare providers treating residents in every region of Michigan.

"My communities, and frankly the whole state of Michigan, are being devastated by the lack of mental health access," Sen. VanderWall said. "Michigan residents deserve better. Recognizing these critical providers will inform residents they are qualified and available."

"This difficult work is about developing trust with patients," The Michigan Academy of PAs President Jodi Zych, PA-C, said. "Too often patients in crises do not know where to go unaware of the high quality of care we provide."

Psychiatric medicine is among the fastest growing specialties for PAs. Over 6,000 PAs in Michigan are educated and trained in psychiatry. Michigan is now home to ten PA schools* including most public universities.

SB 826 will lift barriers to services that many Michigan patients desperately need. This legislation brings the Mental Health Code in line with other areas of Michigan statute. NPs, PAs and CNSs provide this critically important care in other healthcare settings and in most states.

"Michigan has a tremendous un-met need for acute mental illness care," The Michigan Council of Nurse Practitioners President Mary Anne McCoy PhD, ACNP-BC, FAANP stated. "Eighty-five percent of Michiganders are not being seen for the most common disorders of anxiety, depression and substance use disorders. We need to do all we can to make sure the people of Michigan are able to receive the treatment they deserve."

A recent Michigan study highlighted residents with the least access to mental health treatment -- 33 counties do not have a psychiatrist and more than 650,000 Michiganders are living with untreated mental illness.

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