



PA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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PAEAonline.org • 703-548-5538

May 28, 2024

The Honorable Jerry Cirino
Ohio State Senate
1 Capitol Square
Ground Floor, Room 034

Dear Chairman Cirino:

On behalf of the PA Education Association (PAEA), the national organization representing all 309 accredited PA programs in the United States, we are writing to express the Association's concerns with SB60, which proposes to create a certified mental health assistant role in the state of Ohio. While it is critical that all policymakers act to ensure access to needed mental and behavioral health care, PAEA believes that creating a new and untested provider type at a time when PAs and other advanced practice providers are already equipped to provide high-quality mental health services threatens patient safety. As such, we urge the Ohio legislature to reconsider this bill and instead invest in training more providers in professions with a demonstrated track record of high-quality training.

Since the creation of the profession in the mid-1960s, PAs have played a critical role in addressing workforce shortages in high-demand specialties. The PA program curriculum, taking place at the graduate-level, consists of approximately one year of classroom-based training followed by at least one year of clinical rotations in a wide array of specialties and settings. During the clinical year, students complete rotations in family medicine, emergency medicine, surgery, pediatrics, women's health, and behavioral health, among other electives. This generalist training prepares PA graduates particularly well to treat patients suffering from both physical and mental health conditions.

While the PA profession is uniquely equipped to respond to mental health workforce shortages, the most significant challenge facing PA programs as they seek to prepare graduates to enter the workforce is shortages of clinical training sites. According to recent PAEA data, nearly two-thirds of PA programs report having to pay for some or all of their rotations, significantly limiting potential expansion and raising out-of-pocket costs for

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students.¹ Proposals like SB60 which raise the possibility of greater competition for an already-limited pool of clinical sites would significantly impede the ability of Ohio's 17 PA programs to produce enough graduates to meet demand for care among patients in the state. For this reason, PAEA urges the legislature to instead support innovative ways to expand access to clinical training opportunities such as continued funding for the Ohio Primary Care Workforce Initiative and new tax incentives for clinical preceptors. By doing so, the legislature can signal its commitment to access to high-quality care for all patients.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Association's perspective on SB60. Should you have specific questions or if you would like additional information, please contact Senior Director of Government Relations Tyler Smith at 703-667-4356 or tsmith@PAEAonline.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara F. Fletcher".

Sara Fletcher, PhD
Chief Executive Officer

¹ PA Education Association. (2023). *By the Numbers: Program Report 36: Data from the 2021 Program Survey*. https://paeaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/PAEA-PR36-final-v5-3_updated-2-9-24.pdf