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House Health Committee

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House Bill 1021 – *Health Occupations – Licensed Psychologists – Prescriptive Authority*

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, **opposes** House Bill 1021.

This legislation would authorize psychologists to prescribe, which includes not only the ability to prescribe prescription drugs, but also to order laboratory tests, medicines, devices, other treatments and diagnostic examinations. Additionally, rather than setting an independently defined entity to assess proper educational attainment, as most licensure boards do, House Bill 1021 allows the Board of Examiners of Psychologists to determine whether an educational program should be recognized for purposes of allowing a psychologist to prescribe.

House Bill 1021 attempts to put psychologists on equal footing with physicians in many respects. However, their training is substantially different and that difference raises serious concerns about patient safety. The patient care hours that a physician must acquire in order to be licensed range from 12,000 to 16,000 hours upon completion of a 4-year medical school. These hours include intensive experience across diverse clinical settings, requiring them to develop clinical judgment and manage complex cases involving co-occurring medical and psychiatric conditions.

In contrast, a psychologist, while required to obtain a doctoral degree, does not undertake anywhere near the number of patient care hours as a physician, and their training is not focused on both the physical and mental aspects of health in the same way as a physician is. There are two pathways to licensure as a psychologist under Maryland law, and while both require some level of supervised experience, it does not match that required of a physician, and most importantly does not require even close to the same level of patient care hours.

We recognize that this effort to expand the scope of psychologists to include prescribing is couched in terms of access, as many scope bills are. However, even in those few states where psychologists have been given such authority, very few have become authorized to prescribe. Furthermore, in those states, the psychologists who obtain the authority to prescribe tend to do so in areas that are not underserved.

For these reasons, MedChi opposes House Bill 1021.

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