

Dear VPA Members:

The following information is provided by Dr. Rick Barnett, our Legislative Committee Chairperson.

It's an exciting time for Vermonters re: MH Legislation and RxP. We have a sponsor and a bill has been introduced for Prescriptive Authority for Advanced Trained Psychologist-Doctorates (Prescribing Psychologists). The link is listed here:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/H-0280/H-0280%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

Here's what you can do to support this bill. (if you don't support it, we respectively ask for a position of neutrality):

1. Contact House Health Care Committee Chair - Rep. Bill Lippert: wlippert@leg.state.vt.us
2. Reach out to your local legislator (House and Senate) [Click here to Find Your Legislator](#)
3. At the bottom of this email is a letter written by VPA Past-President Judith Markey to her local Senator in support of this bill. You can modify and use it to reach out to your legislator. (also, see attached fact sheet to educate yourself and others if necessary).
4. We are in the Education/Raising Awareness Phase. This is unlikely to get "action" this session but we must try!
5. In order for it to be taken up by the committee, the chair of the committee Rep. Bill Lippert must be nudged by fellow legislators, constituents, and supporters of the bill.
6. Please **direct advocacy to your legislator** to have them **nudge** Rep. Lippert and nudge Rep. Lippert directly yourself.

Note: Rep. Lippert stated to me in committee that:

- a) He believes most psychiatrists conduct psychotherapy sessions (only the minority do as evidenced by data and experience).
- b) He was not aware of the extensive training requirements - doctorate in psychology, master's in psychopharmacology, minimum 1 year supervised experience prescribing under a prescriber with minimum 100 patients, can only prescribe with documented communication with primary care provider.

A Senate companion bill would be excellent, though the window may have passed. Still, Senate H&W is aware of the legislation. Senator Lyons, Ingram, Ayer, and McCormack should be made aware of any and all support.

Please see the sample letter below.

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear Representative or Senator (name): I am writing to ask you to urge Representative Bill Lippert, Chair of House Health Care Committee, to take up H.280 which authorizes the Board of Psychological Examiners to grant Prescriptive Authority to doctoral-level psychologists with an additional Master's Degree in psychopharmacology and specific clinical training and collaboration requirements. I strongly support this measure because it will help to improve access to higher quality mental health treatment for people suffering from mental health problems.

As you know, we have a severe shortage of psychiatrists in Vermont, particularly in rural areas. It falls to primary care physicians and nurse practitioners to write prescriptions for individuals with mental health issues. Generally the PCP's and NP's do a good job with managing medications but they want help from experts in mental health diagnosis and treatment, especially with more complex patients.

Psychologists have had prescriptive authority since 1990's through the Department of Defense, and later in the Public Health Service, Indian Health Service, Guam, New Mexico, Louisiana, Illinois, and Iowa. There have been no reported adverse outcomes or malpractice complaints related to prescriptive authority for psychologists. Malpractice insurance through the American Psychological Association Insurance Trust is only a few hundred dollars more for prescribing psychologists, which says a lot about the safe care prescribing psychologists offer.

The language in this measure will provide the necessary safeguards to ensure only those psychologists with appropriate education, clinical training and registration will be authorized to manage a patient's medication from a limited formulary of psychiatric medications.

Passing this bill will give properly trained and approved doctoral-level psychologists the ability to help patients who might otherwise be unable to access providers who can provide high quality mental healthcare that they need, and should have a right to access. Please help us improve mental health in Vermont by adding this workforce to a mental health system badly in need of improvement. Between current shortages of psychiatrists and coming retirements, Vermont could be facing an even worse shortages for those in need of mental health care.

Not only do Vermonters need this now, we would save health care dollars by cutting out one mental health visit. These trained psychologists could offer both psychotherapy and medication. Other states have already passed this and are having great success, particularly in their rural areas where the need is great and access is difficult. We would appreciate your support on prescription privilege.

Dr. Rick Barnett of the Vermont Psychological Association will be in touch with you about this issue. His contact information is listed below.

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