

February 6, 2019

The Honorable Rosalyn Baker
Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Consumer Protection, and Health
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania St., Room 230
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Chair Baker:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I write in **opposition to Hawaii Senate Bill (S.B.) 819**, which would allow clinical psychologists to prescribe psychotropic medications. While the AMA values the role that psychologists play in our nation's health care system, we do not believe that granting them prescriptive authority is the solution to improving access to mental health services in Hawaii. Rather, this proposal would risk patient safety and expose patients, including children and adolescents, to inadequate mental health care.

Physicians have 10,000 hours of comprehensive medical education and training

The education and training of psychologists is vastly different from the education and training of physicians. Physicians have more than 10,000 hours and seven-to-11 years of postgraduate clinical education and training to enable them to correctly diagnose, treat and manage patients' health care needs. In comparison, psychologists are only required to have one year of patient care experience during their training—training that is focused entirely on **non-medical** therapies.

In sharp contrast to psychology training, at each stage of a medical student's education and training, medical students learn how pharmacotherapy integrates into all branches of medicine, such as family medicine and psychiatry, including child and adolescent psychiatry. Physicians are tested on this knowledge as part of the medical licensure process, with particular emphasis on pharmacotherapy in the third and fourth part of the United States Medical Licensing Exam—a series of four examinations that physicians must take and pass in order to be licensed to practice medicine in the United States.

After graduation from medical school, psychiatric resident physicians spend more than four more years learning the complexities related to appropriate prescribing in multiple clinical situations and settings—gaining in-depth knowledge essential to their chosen specialty. Such medical education and training are essential to safely treat patients and prescribe psychotropic medications that are used to treat mental illness and other conditions. There is no equivalent in psychologists' education and training, even with the additional pharmacologic educational requirements anticipated in this legislation.

Granting psychologists prescriptive authority threatens patient safety

Insufficiently trained psychologists with a prescription pad would put medically complex patients at risk. Powerful psychotropic drugs affect a patient's entire body not just their mental illness. As described above, psychologists do not have any medical training and, therefore, cannot understand the potential complex interactions of these medications on their patients. This is particularly true for children, pregnant women, seniors and anyone with chronic medical conditions. Those patients need a well-trained physician who understands the complex interactions drugs have on the human body. **Patients agree, 83 percent of patients believe only a physician should be allowed to write a prescription for complex drugs.**

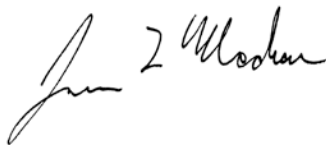
Hawaii physicians and psychologists practice in same locations

While we agree that patients need greater access to care in rural areas, the data show that Hawaii psychologists are not any better geographically situated to serve rural populations than psychiatrists and other primary care physicians in Hawaii (see attached map). In the few states where psychologists have been granted prescriptive authority, psychologists continue to work in the same areas as physicians. While we encourage you to continue a dialogue on access to mental health care in Hawaii, we strongly believe granting psychologists prescriptive authority does not address these complex issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. For the reasons outlined above, we urge you and the members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Health to **oppose S.B. 819**. If you have any questions, please contact Kimberly Horvath, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at kimberly.horvath@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4783.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

Attachment

cc: Hawaii Medical Association
American Psychiatric Association