



An Act Enabling Physician Assistants to Authorize Psychiatric and Substance Abuse Holds

S.1137/H.1709

Sponsors: Sen. Vinny DeMacedo and Rep. Marjorie Decker

Summary

This bill modifies MGL Section 12 (psychiatric) and 35 (substance abuse) of Ch. 123 by adding physician assistants to the list of medical professionals (such as physicians and nurse practitioners) who can civilly commit any persons posing risk of serious harm by reason of mental illness or chemical dependence.

With this change in statute, PAs would be able to place a temporary hold on a patient in an emergency setting or petition the court to require someone to be civilly committed and treated involuntarily for an alcohol or substance use disorder. This would promote the safety of both the patient and the public.

Why we need S.1137/H.1709

39% of the PAs in our state practice in a primary care setting and have a caseload of patients with whom they work closely. **Almost 30% of Massachusetts PAs work in an ambulatory or community hospital setting.**

Whether in an emergency health setting or a private practice, **PAs overwhelmingly work directly with patients in a clinical setting and are often the first provider to evaluate a patient who is at risk of harming themselves or others.**

Under current laws a PA who believes a patient requires hospitalization because of mental illness or chemical dependence **must solicit the support of a qualifying medical provider, such as a physician or nurse practitioner**, to authorize an emergency hold or petition the courts. The qualifying individual often has no relationship with the individual and yet is expected to attest to the status of the patient's mental health and/or substance abuse disorder.

Additionally, when PAs have to track down a qualified provider to authorize a hold, this process **can result in delayed care or even leave a patient unsupervised.**

In order to keep patients and those around them safe, **PAs should be added to the list of medical professionals who are permitted to place patients on emergency holds or petition the courts.**

Please Support S.1137/H.1709, An Act Enabling Physician Assistants to Authorize Psychiatric and Substance Abuse Holds