

Testimony to the Mental Health and Wellness Commission

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I speak to you today as a 30 year provider of Mental Health Services, first as a Psychiatric Registered Nurse and now as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. I have worked in the public and the private sector and in outpatient, residential and inpatient psychiatric settings. I have worked directly with patients on an inpatient mental health unit, managed inpatient mental health units, directed innovative treatment programs and now work full time as a prescribing Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner at a Community Mental Health Center.

Today we are asked to comment on GAPS in the Mental Health System. Throughout my many years of service I have always seen *accessibility to services* as one of our biggest issues. Around this state it can take weeks or months to get into see a provider that can assess, diagnose and treat mental illness. Untreated these disorders progress, create symptoms that impair day to day functioning, the ability to engage in life and can lead to thoughts and intentions of hurting oneself or others.

In order to fill this gap I would strongly suggest that Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners are ideally suited to the meet this need and should be a part of the solution. It is well known that there are not enough psychiatrists currently available, being trained or recruited to this State. Michigan Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners are already meeting the needs of thousands of Michigan residents that benefit from psychiatric treatment. But, there are barriers to practicing as a Nurse Practitioner in the State of Michigan and these barriers need to be removed.

There is currently long needed legislation being addressed in the Senate as Senate Bill 2. This bill will seek to define the scope of practice of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses that reflects our education, training and certification and will modernize the Public Health Code to address APRNs.

There is over 40 years of research that has proven that Nurse Practitioners are high quality, cost-effective health care providers. Further, it has been shown that access to healthcare is better for citizens in states that permit Nurse Practitioners a scope of practice reflective of their education, experience and certification. We must update our Public Health Code, remove the barriers to practice for Nurse Practitioners and better utilized Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners to meet this **gap in access** to treating providers. Please be sure to educate yourself on this very important bill and vote yes for this bill and encourage your fellow Legislators to do the same.

In our society, we see all too often, the disastrous results of individuals with significant and untreated psychosis. Aside from improving access to care we need to be educated as a society to recognize, identify and help these individuals seek treatment. This comes with reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and a general overall better understanding these are common disorders and successfully treated. To do otherwise is a disservice to our society.

The treatment of mental illness with medications is certainly not the only intervention to promote Mental Health and overall Wellness. But, for millions it not only improves their day to day functioning, it saves their life.

Thank you.

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