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The Honorable Denise Tepler, Chair
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Cross Building, Room 220,
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

March 10, 2021

Dear Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association, a national medical specialty society representing more than 38,800 psychiatric physicians, as well as their patients and families, we urge you to oppose LD 295, which would eliminate the current supervision and training requirements for newly licensed nurse practitioners and would negatively impact patient safety in Maine.

Access to mental health and substance use disorder care is a legitimate concern in the country, however, patients should be confident that their health care providers have sufficient education and training. Currently, Maine law requires nurses to be supervised by a physician or other nurse practitioner for a 24-month period before they can practice independently. LD 295 proposes to lower the threshold and qualifications for licensure and allow nurse practitioners to practice without any supervision from a physician or supervising nurse practitioner as soon as they graduate from a nurse practitioner program. Nurse practitioners play a vital role in patient care, but they are not trained to practice independently throughout their education; rather, they are trained to provide care in a health care team including a physician. LD 295 wrongly deems newly graduated nurse practitioners as equal to licensed physicians in clinical readiness. Even physicians do not work independently before the end of their residency, though at that point they have much more education and training than nurses.

Maine law requires allopathic physicians seeking licensure in Maine to complete at least 24 months in a graduate educational program accredited by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). For osteopathic physicians, the law requires completion of an internship of at least 12 months in a hospital conforming to the minimal standards for accreditation by the American Osteopathic Association, or the equivalency, as determined by the Board of Licensure in Medicine. Postgraduate training is a critical step for any clinical health care provider before caring for patients independently. It teaches them to apply what they learned in

nursing practice programs, physician assistant programs, and medical schools in true healthcare settings in order to build additional competencies. We are concerned that removing the current two-year supervision and training requirement for nurse practitioners will lead to a lower standard of health care in Maine.

Additionally, physician education and training and advanced practice nurse education and training are not equal. Psychiatrists are physicians who complete a rigorous four-year medical residency in psychiatry after they complete medical school. This is over 12,000 hours of training specializing in medical treatment of mental health conditions and substance use disorders. While the ACGME establishes baseline requirements for all MD and DO training programs, this is not true for nurse practitioner programs; nurse practitioner training is highly variable. The current 24-month period of supervision for nurse practitioners in Maine is critical for them to learn how to properly diagnose and treat patients. Our members know first-hand that psychiatric medications used to treat mental illnesses are among the most potent in modern medicine. They affect the central nervous system, but also affect other organ systems and interact with other medications. These medications have potentially disabling and deadly side effects if improperly prescribed. Maintaining the statutory requirement to work alongside an experienced physician or supervising nurse practitioner is an essential safeguard to ensure patients receive safe and efficient quality treatment.

Patient safety must be the driver behind any modification to our health laws. We urge you to oppose LD 295. Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns. Please contact Erin Philp, Director of State Government Relations, at ephilp@psych.org, with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Saul Levin" followed by "M.D., M.P.A., FRCP-E, FRCPsych" in smaller text.

Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A., FRCP-E, FRCPsych
CEO and Medical Director
American Psychiatric Association