



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier introducing*  
**LD 1166, An Act to Change the Professional Title and Identification of  
Physician Assistants to Physician Associates**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services*

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Kristen Cloutier and I proudly represent House District 94, part of my hometown of Lewiston. I'm pleased today to introduce **LD 1166, An Act to Change the Professional Title and Identification of Physician Assistants to Physician Associates** and provide you with a friendly amendment.

"Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." This famous line from Gertrude Stein's poem "Sacred Emily" speaks to identity, what is in a name, and that things are what they are. While the purpose of this bill is simple, to change the professional title for PAs from physician assistant to physician associate, it is in no way insignificant. Rigorously educated at the master's degree level, PAs practice medicine in every specialty and setting. Yet, there is a common misconception among patients that PAs only "assist" physicians when, in fact, they diagnose, treat, and provide high-quality medical care to patients.

Before changing their professional title, the American Academy of PAs did extensive research. Working in collaboration with WPP, a work leader in providing fully integrated health marketing, communications, and research solutions, they engaged in a two-year comprehensive and independent investigation. Their findings were that the current title of physician assistant provided neither the proper awareness nor the proper understanding of the PA role and scope of practice with patients, physicians, and employers. Indeed, this lack of understanding, coupled with the current title, further magnified misperceptions of the PA profession. When considering the expectations of care and official definition of a PA, researchers found that both employers and patients noted that the title "physician associate" more closely aligns with the types of care provided by a PA.

The purpose of this legislation is to change Maine law to reflect the PA title nationally, as well as locally. Last year, MEAPA changed their name to Maine Academy of Physician Associates, instead of Physician Assistants. PAs do more than "assist" physicians, and the title of the profession should reflect that.

What's more, and the reason why this bill is so important to me, is that excellent healthcare starts with human connection and strong personal relationships. Trust and connection begin with a patient's first encounter with their provider. LD 1166 will help to ensure patients understand the role of PAs in healthcare delivery and the high-quality care PAs provide. They do so much more than "assist." A more accurate professional title contributes to patient confidence and clarity about their care. I've worked hard during my legislative tenure to advocate for provider-led solutions to address the current healthcare workforce shortage and other challenges to accessing care. When MEAPA brought this policy forward and asked if I would sponsor this bill, I responded with an enthusiastic "yes!". Unlike some other states, Maine law recognizes PAs as separate from physicians when it comes to liability and maintains a collaborative relationship between the two, versus a supervisory one. Our laws allow PAs to practice more easily to the top of their license and education and creates a pathway for PAs to practice solo as long as they have a formal arrangement with a physician for consultations. This makes our state attractive for PA practice. Last year, Maine passed legislation allowing us to join the PA interstate compact, making our state even more enticing for these qualified clinicians to move here and provide much-needed healthcare to Mainers.

It makes sense to update statute to accurately reflect the professional title for PAs, making Maine an even more desirable place for PAs to practice in. Anything we can do to encourage healthcare providers to stay in Maine, or move to Maine, is well worth our efforts.

Lastly, advocates have been in contact with Tim Terranova at the Board of Licensure in Medicine and I have submitted and attached amended language to address some unintentional conflicts and to improve clarity. Please consider this language as you deliberate on the bill.

In closing, the value PAs bring to Maine's healthcare system is undeniable, demonstrated by their frontline service during the COVID-19 pandemic and during other healthcare emergencies. As highly respected medical professionals, PAs have an essential role in delivering high-quality, team-based healthcare. They deserve to have that accurately reflected in their professional title.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sponsor's amendment to LD 1166, "An Act to Change the Professional Title and Identification of Physician Assistants to Physician Associates"

Changes are indicated in red.

Please consider the following changes to Section 2, page 4, beginning at line 28.

**6. Title and practice protection.** A person who is not licensed under this section may not hold that person out to be a physician associate or use the title or designation "physician associate" or the abbreviation "P.A." or any other title, designation, words, letters or device tending to indicate that that person is licensed under this section, except that a person who meets the qualifications for licensure under subsection 2 but does not possess a current license may use the title or designation "physician associate" or the abbreviation "P.A." but may not practice as a physician associate. This change is not intended to change any rights or privileges of those who hold physician assistant licenses from the board as of the enactment date of this statute and have been or continue to hold themselves out to be a "physician assistant."

Individuals licensed as physician assistants, as of the effective date of this statute, may refer to themselves as either "physician assistants" or "physician associates." Upon licensure renewal, these individuals shall receive a license as a "physician associate" and shall thereafter hold themselves out as "physician associates."

A violation of this subsection is a Class E crime.

Please consider the following change in Section 3, page 4, beginning at line 36.

**Sec. 3. Maine Revised Statutes amended; revision clause.** Whenever in the Maine Revised Statutes the words "physician assistant" appear or reference is made to those words, those words are amended to read "physician associate" and the Revisor of Statutes shall implement this revision when updating, publishing or republishing the statutes, except that the words "physician assistant" are not amended when referring to the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, or the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, Title 32, chapter 145-A PA licensure compact, and where the words "physician assistant" appear in Title 32, section 2594-E, subsection 2, paragraph A and Title 32, section 3270-E, subsection 2, paragraph A as amended by this Act.