

Heath Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Joint Standing Committee

Testimony in Support

LD 1166 – An Act to Change the Professional Title and Identification of Physician Assistants to Physician Associates

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and members of the HCIFS Committee, my name is Kimberly Caldwell, I'm an Auburn resident, a practicing PA and the Maine District Medical Director for ConvenientMD Urgent Care throughout Maine. I'm also the Immediate-Past-President of the Maine Academy of Physician Associates (MEAPA).

I've been a practicing PA in Maine since 2007, prior to that I obtained a Masters in PA Studies degree from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. This program was rigorous over 3 years with pharmacology, gross anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, organic chemistry, you get the idea. Plus over 2,000 hrs of clinical rotations, cycling through various specialties like emergency medicine, surgery, geriatrics, pediatrics, women's health, psychiatry, inpatient medicine and primary care. I passed my initial board certification in 2007 and have taken recertification boards exams twice, in 2013 and 2019. Every two years I must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education. I've practiced clinically in general and trauma surgery, inpatient medicine and now urgent care. I've met people on some of the worst days of their lives and helped them and their families through them. I've held the hand of dying patients in their last moments, easing their physical and emotional pain.

In my first few years of practice I had countless encounters with patients/their families asking me, "when will you finish becoming a doctor?" I became quite efficient at explaining the difference between the two professions and that I had in fact completed my training.

In 2013, I met my now husband, about 5 years later his sister began her training to become a Medical Assistant (MA). At her graduation party, many members of our family were congratulating her on joining my profession. Awkward. Fortunately for me and to her credit, she quickly corrected all those in the room, explaining that she was rooming patients for PAs to see, doing tests they ordered and interpreted, she was a PA's helper. She explained her diploma program was quite different from the years of training I had. I of course was very relieved not to have to walk the tight rope of celebrating her accomplishments while also explaining that we were not in fact "the same". The fact is our professions title doesn't align with what we do and is causing ongoing confusion.

April 3rd, 2025

Physician Assistant does not adequately represent what PAs do daily. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes “Assistant” as a noun, “a person who assists someone/a helper. Merriam-Webster also defines “Associate” as a noun, “one associated with another, a partner or colleague, or an entry-level member of a profession” or as an Adjective “closely connected with another, sharing in responsibility or authority, or having secondary or subordinate status, and closely related especially in the mind.” We assert that Associate is a far superior description of the collaborative relationship we have with our physician colleagues.

Our request for professional title change is just that a name change, it does not in any way change scope of practice. It’s merely aligning the title with the role we are currently in. There is precedent, 2 PA programs including Yale have for decades graduated Physician Associates. In 2021, our national organization American Academy of Physician Assistants (now Associates) after years of debate and intense investigation/research, changed the name of our profession to “Physician Associate”, as our profession in its infancy was named. Since then, many constituent organizations, specialty organizations have changed their names and the professions title. In April 2024, Oregon was the first state to pass title change legislation, this took effect in June of 2024. Here in Maine, MEAPA began surveying constituents (88% supported the change) and last October voted to change the title in our bylaws, becoming Maine Academy of Physician Associates in the process.

Bottom line, PA’s do more than assist physicians, we have a proven track record of collaboration with our physician colleagues, demonstrating safety in diagnosing, prescribing, counselling, performing a multitude of procedures and yes assisting in surgery.

I humbly request you vote Ought to Pass on LD 1166, to align Maine with national trends and improve patients understanding of our role on the healthcare teams.

Sincerely,

Kimberly M. Caldwell, MPAS, PA-C
Maine Medical Director, ConvenientMD Urgent Care
Resident: Auburn, ME