

May 28, 2007

The Honorable Linda Lingle
Governor, State of Hawaii
Executive Chambers
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: VETO SB 1004 Relating to Psychologists

Dear Governor Lingle,

We are a diverse group of clinical psychologists who urge you to veto SB 1004, which would give special prescriptive authority to some mental health professionals based on minimal training. Our wide-ranging roles – clinicians, educators, researchers – are bound together by a devotion to psychological science for the greatest good of society. We are also united in our opposition to this legislation. We view it as an unnecessary risk to both patient care and the integrity of clinical psychology. Therefore, we seek to protect those with mental health needs and our own clinical science from a “turf war” fueled by political and economic interests that could do great damage to the relationship between psychology and medicine.

We urge you veto this bill because the crossover medical training required in SB 1004 is weak and could be dangerous to the public health. We oppose the practice of psychology based on the least-possible training, why not also medicine? This bill requires only about a third of the training required in the Department of Defense “PDP” program. That program, which trained 10 people at a cost of \$6.1 million and is hailed by proponents as a model, was deemed *not* cost-effective by the General Accounting Office. Nevertheless, Hawaii’s Legislative Reference Bureau report on this topic recommends training at least as rigorous as that of the PDP – one year of university-based full-time instruction and one year of practicum. It also recommends limiting psychologists’ special prescriptive practice authority to that of the PDP graduates: Outpatient-only treatment of adults under 65 without serious medical or mental health conditions, working collaboratively within medical centers. However, SB 1004 would require far less in training and allow far greater practice authority. If the State of Hawaii adopts psychologist prescription privileges, it will in effect be embarking on a large-scale experiment, the results of which may not be known for many years. Regrettably, the often unwitting subjects of that experiment will be citizens in the greatest need of the highest quality psychological and psychiatric care.

We urge you veto this bill and instead improve the quality of psychiatric care through medical systems already in place. There is no lack of health care professionals who can prescribe psychiatric medication. Every licensed physician may prescribe these drugs, and virtually all primary care doctors do so routinely. Physicians’ assistants and nurse-practitioners can prescribe them as well. If psychologists trained in psychopharmacology were *collaborating* with the many existing prescribers rather than

competing with them, they could improve the quality of care for all patients of all physicians. Only 25 percent of prescriptions for psychoactive medications are written by psychiatrists, so a lack of psychiatrists in a geographic area is easily compensated by collaborations among professionals, rather than adding weakly trained crossovers from a non-medical profession.

We urge you to veto this bill and refer mental health professionals with prescriptive aspirations to existing medical training programs. Any individual could acquire broader prescriptive authority than what SB 1004 would allow psychologists, and without special and divisive legislation. This greater authority is available through training as a physician, or through shorter programs to train physicians' assistants (about the same length as the military's PDP program for psychologists) and advanced-practice nurses. The professional oversight and regulation of those licensees is also already established.

We urge you to veto this bill and call for psychology to get its fractious house in order first. Many have left the American Psychological Association over the prescription privileges issue, where dissent unfortunately has been muzzled by preventing divisions and sections within APA from voicing open disagreement, which gives outsiders the erroneous impression of a professional organization united behind prescription privileges. No survey of the membership at large has been allowed, but it is estimated that about half of all psychologists would oppose this legislation. Only the APA and its subsidiaries have waged this pro-prescription privileges campaign; other organizations made up of or including psychologists have not joined it. We urge you to require the APA to gather evidence of the true opinions of its membership, and of other psychologists, before inflicting this divisive "turf war" on Hawaii and its health care community.

Thank you for your kind consideration of these opinions.

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