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MODERNIZING THE PENNSYLVANIA CHIROPRACTIC PRACTICE ACT A Brief Introduction and Summary

In 1951, the Chiropractic Registration Act was signed into law in Pennsylvania. In 1986, new legislation governing Chiropractors in Pennsylvania was signed into law. The 1986 law is known as the Chiropractic Practice Act (“Act”) and it provides for, among other things, the licensing of chiropractors, the regulation of the practice of chiropractic, and the establishment of the State Board of Chiropractic. Since 1986, there has been one legislative change to the Act that permits student chiropractic interns in the chiropractic office.

There is a need for substantial change. In states all over the country, outdated chiropractic laws have been subject to judicial review. Courts across the country have interpreted old and antiquated laws that threaten the importance of chiropractic in the healthcare system. Here are just a few examples:

- In 2005, a New Jersey court re-defined the scope of practice of New Jersey chiropractors to eliminate adjustments of the extremities (e.g., arms and legs). As a result of the decision, the New Jersey legislature passed new laws to clarify that the scope of practice of New Jersey Chiropractors includes the extremity regions.
- In 2021, the Supreme Court of Texas reversed the district court and the appeals court in a ten-year-old dispute between the Texas Medical Board and the Texas Chiropractic Board to preserve a chiropractor’s ability to diagnose certain nerve and neurological problems in addition to musculoskeletal problems.
- In 2017, the Pennsylvania Superior Court interpreted the current Chiropractic Practice Act to prohibit chiropractors from delegating certain procedures to supportive personnel.
- In 2021, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court interpreted the Chiropractic Practice Act and the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act in a case involving the chiropractic treatment of animals.

Court intervention in cases involving the scope of practice for chiropractors is an ongoing concern, especially when the court decisions are contrary to public policy and the legislative intent. Consequently, states all over the country are passing new, comprehensive laws designed to clarify ambiguities that exist in outdated statutes and to modernize laws to conform with the changes to our healthcare delivery system. Pennsylvania needs legislative change to modernize the laws for chiropractors and the patients they serve.

Moreover, modernizing the law can give Pennsylvania a competitive advantage over other states. In 2023, the Pennsylvania Medical Assistance Advisory Committee (MAAC) urged Governor Shapiro to establish the Governor’s Office of Health Care Workforce Innovation and Reform, Cabinet Advisory Council to address Pennsylvania’s “severe healthcare workforce shortage”. This resolution urged Governor Shapiro to create a strategic plan and implement such a plan to address the “crisis”. In the last decade, the number of licensed chiropractors in Pennsylvania has declined, while the population has increased.

The need for modernization of chiropractic laws has gained traction over the years nationwide. This prompted The Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Boards in January 2015 to create and issue a “Model Practice Act”. Many states have implemented laws based on the Model Practice Act. Pennsylvania must do the same.

Modernizing laws in the healthcare field serve a legitimate public purpose. New standards for scope of practice, regulations, malpractice insurance, continuing education, and disciplinary action promote integrity within the healthcare community and protect the patients.

The following items can confirm the existing scope of practice of chiropractors as initially intended by the legislature by removing ambiguity while at the same time redefining areas as healthcare has evolved since 1986:

- Adjunctive procedures
- Practice of Chiropractic
- Animal Chiropractic
- Dry Needling
- Chiropractic Manipulative Treatment (Adjustment)
- Chiropractic in sports
- Concussion management
- Licensure standards
- Reciprocity and fee waivers for armed forces/service members and their spouses
- Disciplinary action
- Continuing Education
- Malpractice insurance standards
- Sports Chiropractors traveling to Pennsylvania
- Board certifications and specialties
- Practicing with other licensed health care providers
- Expert testimony
- Standards for peer reviews and medical necessity reviews
- Conforming terminology to national standards

The PCA believes that a modernized Act is paramount for the future of Chiropractic and health care in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Chiropractic Association (“PCA”) is assuming the lead role in the creation of a modernized set of standards for licensed chiropractors in Pennsylvania. PCA would appreciate any assistance and financial contributions.

For More Information and Details



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