



February 2, 2021

Representative Rachel Prusak, Chair  
House Committee on Health Care

RE: HB 2619 – Support for genetic counselors

Chair Prusak and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Roxanne Payne. I'm an oncology nurse practitioner and Director of Advanced Practice for Providence Cancer Institute in the Portland. I have worked in oncology as both a nurse and now nurse practitioner for nearly 30 years. In that time, the expansion of knowledge and understanding of the impact of genetics on cancer diagnoses or hereditary syndromes has been exponential.

Genetic counselors have education and professional certification specific to the role of assessing the risk of genetic traits passed through families that may increase the risk of the development of syndromes, diseases or cancers within those families. Their expertise includes evaluating family histories and providing information to patients in a way that helps them understand the meaning of their personal risk for development of a disease or condition. They can help establish a plan for moving forward. This can mean risk reduction strategies, such as surgical decision making, surveillance of a health condition or recommendations for other family members who may also be affected.

Given the rapid growth in the field of cancer genetics, there are not enough professionals to counsel the increasing number of patient groups for which genetic counseling is recommended. This has led to a real barrier for patients needing to access this service. Lack of professional licensure in our state has compounded this issue – most insurance companies will not credential a health care provider who is not licensed. This means that prospective patients must either wait for extended periods to be placed on a credentialed provider's clinic schedule or opt to pay out of pocket for the services of a genetic counselor. Implementation of licensure for the genetic counseling discipline will enable them to more fully function as the valuable members of the health care team that they are, as well as remove significant barriers to care of the population of our state.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for listening and ask for your support of House Bill 2619.