Dear Director Sterling and Professional Licensing Division Staff,

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Georgia Chapter writes to express our concern over the implementation timeline for the Georgia Online Application & Licensing System (GOALS). According to your office's publicly available documents, our profession was scheduled to go live in October of 2023 with GOALS.

As of this month, the association has received hundreds of inquiries from Physical Therapists (PTs) and Physical Therapy Assistants (PTAs) seeking additional guidance and expressing concern over response times from board staff. We understand that no migration is simple, but we want to elevate the concerns and frustrations expressed by our members.

Our records show we have over 11,000 licensed PTs and 5,000 PTAs in Georgia. These licensees are all slated for renewal by December 31. Our membership reports significant bugs in the system: autofill functions populating incorrect information, paperwork that disappears from the system, renewal licensees receiving questions intended for new graduates, and lagging response times. While this may be common for a new system, we have only six weeks remaining for renewals, minus breaks for Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

We have sat in on meetings with the Professional Licensing Board to express our concerns and have asked for the Licensing Division to put out a guidance document. The request has not been fulfilled, and in response, the association created an informational YouTube video to help members and non-members navigate the errors. This video now has over 1,000 views. This traffic on an otherwise mundane topic illustrates the desperation of our licensees. If their renewals DO NOT take place, the consequences for patient access and employment of our members are immediate.

Without a license, physical therapists can not work or practice, which will bring our patients' treatment to a grinding halt. Medicaid and CAQH Credentialing, which governs re-credentialing for most private insurance, require an updated license. If providers do not have an active license,
they will be dropped from the network. The re-enrollment process for those programs is labor intensive, adding yet another barrier once they receive approval. This delay will lead to delays in both the employment of the PTs and access to the PT by patients.

Many licensees are currently listed as "on hold" status and those licensees have not received any further information about the delay or timeline.

Our ask is twofold:

(1) We respectfully advocate for an extension of the deadline for licensure renewal to ensure that licensees are provided enough time to complete the process without errors. We hope you will help us identify the smoothest way to ensure licenses remain in place while we work through this process.

(2) We would like to work with your office on formal communications with our members about what to expect from this process. We need to understand how to respond to their concerns with information directly from your office.

Our membership is looking for more guidance and a realistic timeline for the fixes to GOALS. We are hopeful you will read this letter and understand our intent is not criticism but collaboration – we are seeking to partner with your office and our state board to ensure the resulting functions of GOALS are as seamless as possible moving forward.

Respectfully,

Dhara Shah, PT, DPT
APTA Georgia President

CC: Executive Director Stacy Price