

Proposal to give nurse practitioners more freedom passes PA Senate by 39-10 vote

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A bill that would give nurse practitioners more freedom passed the Senate by a 39-10 vote Wednesday. Both state senators from Lancaster County, Republicans Ryan Aument and Scott Martin, voted against Senate Bill 25.

Nurse practitioners are authorized to do many but not all of the same things as doctors, and currently are required to have collaborative agreements with two doctors.

Senate Bill 25 and House Bill 100 would lift that requirement and allow them to practice independently after logging 3,600 hours under a collaborative agreement.

A similar bill stalled last year after being approved by the full Senate.

Organizations supporting the proposal range from the Hospital & Health system Association of Pennsylvania to AARP to Pennsylvania Health Access Network, noting that 22 states already have similar laws.

"There's a shortage of health care providers everywhere, it seems," said Cindy Blevins, a longtime nurse practitioner who works at General Internal Medicine in East Hempfield Township and teaches at Millersville University.

Where it's hard for patients to see a doctor or get an appointment in a timely fashion, she said, the proposal "would really help patients."

Blevins also said she had a good student who chose to practice in Maryland instead of here "because she didn't want to have to do a collaborative agreement."

Dr. Dave Simons, president of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society board, said it stands with the Pennsylvania Medical Society, which strongly opposes the proposal.

"Our medical community feels like the most effective care occurs when a team of health care professionals with complementary skills work together," he said. "Breaking that team apart, we don't feel is in the best interest of the patient."

Simons noted that some states have more stringent requirements than Pennsylvania's, saying, "I think currently we have a good balance."

The Pennsylvania Medical Society emphasizes that completing medical school and residency takes seven years, while becoming a nurse practitioner takes three years or less of graduate school.

Citing the National Center for the Analysis of Healthcare Data, it also said the number of nurse practitioners in the state increased 44 percent from 2008 to 2015.

According to the Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners, there are more than 10,700 nurse practitioners in Pennsylvania.

The coalition cites research published in the journal Health Sciences Research that looked at Medicare patient visits, and found results were similar but office visits cost 18 percent less for those who saw nurse practitioners than those who saw doctors.