

## **State senator revives legislation giving nurse practitioners more authority**

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The battle is heating up again over whether nurse practitioners can practice independently of physicians in Pennsylvania.

On Tuesday Sen. Camera Bartolotta (R-Washington) introduced legislation that would allow nurse practitioners to have full practice authority in the commonwealth, which means they could see patients without working under a doctor's supervision.

Senate Bill 25 is identical to a bill that passed the Senate last year but then stalled in the House. The latest bill will have to pass the Senate again and be approved by the House to become law.

Under current law, nurse practitioners need to have collaborative agreements with two physicians and must have completed three years and 3,600 hours of collaboration time in order to practice on their own.

Senate Bill 25 would allow nurse practitioners to see patients without collaborative agreements with physicians, but would still require them to complete three years and 3,600 hours of collaboration time before going independent.

The legislation would still leave Pennsylvania with one of the longest transition periods for nurse practitioners in the nation, according to the Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners.

Nurse practitioners currently have full practice authority in 21 states and the District of Columbia, the coalition said.

In January, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs granted nurse practitioners full practice authority in all VA hospitals in an effort to cut wait times.

Full practice authority in the VA, which is the largest employer of nurse practitioners in the country, gave hope to those in Pennsylvania that the state will soon follow suit.

Nurse practitioners believe their education qualifies them to practice independently, and they cite national studies that claim doing so would expand health care access to underserved populations – including people in rural communities, the elderly and Medicaid patients.

Many local organizations, such as the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania, support giving nurse practitioners full practice authority. Other groups, such as the Pennsylvania Medical Society, have concerns.

Advocates of full practice authority claim that it will improve health care quality, increase access, and lower costs for millions of patients, while opponents fear that it would break up the traditional team practice of physicians and nurses working together.