

September 15, 2015

The Honorable Jason M. Lewis
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 511B
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Kate Hogan
House Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 130
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.2051, An Act to increase access to immunizations

Dear Chairman Lewis and Chairwoman Hogan,

As primary care leaders at Massachusetts General Hospital, we are pleased to support H. 2051, An act to increase access to immunizations. This legislation would authorize medical assistants to administer immunizations when delegated to do so by primary care providers. Currently, Massachusetts is one of only three states in the nation that does not allow this practice which negatively impacts the delivery of care in a variety of ways.

In recent years, we have seen a tragic resurgence of vaccine preventable diseases such as measles and mumps. In addition, there are many thousands of deaths from influenza each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that from the 1976-1977 flu season to the 2006-2007 flu season, flu-associated deaths ranged from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people. As we move closer to flu season, it is critical to enable broad access and eliminate barriers to vaccination for the sake of our patients and the public health of the Commonwealth. Passage of this legislation will allow primary care providers – particularly those practicing in community health centers – to more easily meet the demand for immunizations, and help patients to stay healthy and avoid costly hospital stays.

In addition to providing excellent care to each of our patients, we are also focused on enhancing the overall efficiency of the delivery system at our primary care practices and health centers. In this regard, patients at many of our practices are now experiencing an innovative, team-based approach, whereby each member of the care team plays a critical role in providing care to patients. This approach is intrinsic to the patient-centered medical home and population health management strategies that are being widely deployed across the state to improve patient satisfaction and health outcomes, and to keep care affordable. Certified medical assistants are vital members of the care team, and are already well-trained in administering intramuscular and subcutaneous injections, yet they are not legally able to administer them. This legislation will help to modernize laws that were passed at a far different time in health care and laws that currently fail to acknowledge new and efficient ways of delivering health care services. Just as Massachusetts was at the forefront of health care reform and universal access, so too Massachusetts should now address long overdue changes in the administration of critical health care treatments.

Lastly, by allowing medical assistants to fully utilize their skills and training in the clinical setting (“practice at the top of their license”), this legislation will also help to improve job satisfaction, retention and recruitment efforts. The medical assistant occupation is projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to be one of the fastest growing in the health care sector. Given the dynamic changes that are occurring in our health care system, we should be further encouraging the development of this career path, and not limiting it.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on this important matter, and respectfully urge you to give favorable consideration to H.2051. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Heather Gasper at 617-278-1052 or hgasper@partners.org.

Elisha H. Atkins, MD
Medical Director
MGH Chelsea Heath Center

Karen Carlson, MD
Medical Director, Women's Health Associates
Massachusetts General Hospital

J. Benjamin Crocker, MD
Medical Director
MGH Ambulatory Practice of the Future

Blair Fosburgh, MD
Medical Director, Internal Medicine Associates
Massachusetts General Hospital

John A. Foster MD, MPH
Chief Medical Officer
MGH - North End Waterfront Health

Joseph Gesmundo, MD
Medical Director
MGH Back Bay Healthcare Center

Ardeshir Z. Hashmi, MD
Medical Director
MGH Senior Health

Barbara Holbert M.D
Medical Director
MGH Downtown

Daniel M Horn, MD
Assistant Medical Director
Massachusetts General Physician's Organization
Unit Chief
Internal Medicine Associates

William Kormos, MD
Medical Unit Chief,
Internal Medicine Associates Team 3
Instructor in Medicine, Harvard Medical School

Frannie R. Kronenberg MD, MSc
Medical Director
MGH Bulfinch Medical Group

Joshua P. Metlay, MD, PhD
Chief, Division of General Internal Medicine
Massachusetts General Hospital

James Morrill, MD, PhD,
Chief, Adult Medicine Unit,
MGH Charlestown

Roger Pasinski MD
Medical Director
MGH- Revere HealthCare Center

Lawrence Stratton, MD
Medical Director,
MGH Everett Family Care

Leslie Vensel, MD, FACP
Medical Director
Mass General West Medical Group
Instructor in Medicine, Harvard Medical School

Eric Weil, MD
Associate Chief for Clinical Affairs,
Division of General Internal Medicine
Associate Medical Director for Primary Care,
Mass General Hospital Physicians Organization
Senior Medical Director Population Health Management
Partners Healthcare System.

Amy Wheeler, MD
Revere Adult Medicine Unit Chief
Primary Care Physician Adult Internal Medicine
Diplomate of the American Board of Obesity Medicine

Dean C. Xerras MD
Medical Director
MGH Chelsea Healthcare Center

Sunu Yeh, MD
Medical Director
Primary Care Associates, MGH West