

TEXAS COUNSELING ASSOCIATION
85th Legislative Session – March 24, 2017
WEEKLY UPDATE

CALL TO ACTION:

- **American Counseling Association** Action Alert: Removing the requirement that health insurance include mental health benefits (part of the Essential Health Benefits) is one of the most recent changes to the “American Health Care Act” which is scheduled for a vote today. If you agree that mental health benefits should be covered by insurance, please contact your Federal Representative and request that they vote against AHCA due to the loss of this essential benefit. [Click here](#) to log in and send your message.
- Contact the [House Public Health Committee](#) to express concerns about **HB 1977** (Sheffield) which would add Physician Assistants to the list of “non-physician” mental health professionals.
 - *All other mental health professionals listed in statute are either licensed mental health professionals or in the case of nurses, must have a master’s or doctorate in psychiatric nursing.*
 - *The curriculum for PA programs includes a nominal number of courses in counseling, human development, etc. especially as compared to the coursework required of the other mental health professionals listed.*
 - *Just adding another health care provider to this list will not address workforce shortage areas and could create risk to the public who may seek counseling services from a PA who is ill-prepared to deliver these services.*

What Happened This Week:

- More than 50 advocates for Professional Counselors descended upon the halls of the Texas Legislature on Tuesday, 3/21/17. There, they visited 23 Senate and 32 House offices to promote and engage support for legislation that impacts school counselors as well as professional counselors in private practice. In several cases, they even dissuaded sponsors of bills we don’t like from moving forward with those proposals.
- Marissa Dodson [testified](#) before the House Public Health Committee on HB 1486 which relates to the regulation of and addition of peer specialists as Medicaid providers. Read about Marissa’s experience [here](#).
- [Senate Education Committee](#) reported out CSSB 490. It now heads to the full Senate.
- Senate Finance Committee reported out the Appropriations Bill, SB 1 which includes some compensation enhancements for CPS workers (including counselors). The House leadership doesn’t agree with the funding pattern for SB 1 so we expect a long walk before the budget is completed.

What’s Ahead:

Committee Meetings (as of 3/24/2017) - Go to www.capitol.state.tx.us to read complete bills.

- Monday, March 27, 2017
 - [House Human Services Committee](#), 8:30 am, E2.030 to hear 7 bills, including **HB 1542** (Price) relating to the definition of least restrictive environment for foster care placement; **HB 2335** (Miller, R) relating to requiring training in trauma-

based care for certain child care workers and child protective services caseworkers.

- [Senate State Affairs Committee](#), 9 am, Senate Chamber to hear 15 bills, including **SB 813** (Hughes) relating to the recovery of damages, attorney fees and costs related to frivolous regulatory actions by state agencies.
- [House Licensing and Administrative Procedures Committee](#), 2 pm or upon adjournment, E2.026 to hear 14 bills, including **HB 1508** (Giddings) relating to notices to applicants to and enrollees in certain educational programs regarding the consequences of a criminal conviction on eligibility for an occupational license.
- Tuesday, March 28 2017
 - [House Public Education Committee](#), 8 am, E2.036 to hear 20 bills, including **HB 21** (Huberty) relating to the public school finance system.
 - [House Public Health Committee](#), 8 am, E2.012 to hear 11 bills, including **HB 1977** (Sheffield) to add Physician Assistants to the list of “non-physician mental health providers.” See Call to Action above.

TCA’s Watch List: The TCA [Weekly Tracking Report](#) includes the latest action on each bill that TCA is tracking. To read complete bills go to www.capitol.state.tx.us and enter the bill number. Please note that as bills move through the process, sponsors often offer “committee substitutes.” *As this happens, bill numbers change from HB and SB to CSHB and CSSB. This is important to note to ensure you are reviewing the most recent version of a bill.*

What Can You Do?

- CONTACT [Senate Education Committee](#) members and thank them for quickly reporting out SB 490.
- REGISTER and ATTEND one of the two remaining TCA Advocacy Days. Register at www.txca.org/advocacydays. Bring a friend. TCA membership is encouraged but not required.
- ACT on every alert that you receive. A call is better than an email; a visit is better than a call.
- SHARE the Weekly Update and Call to Action Alerts across your networks and social media. Please acknowledge TCA as your source when you share.
- REVIEW bills that interest you and let jan@txca.org know what you think about them. Set up a personal tracking system at www.capitol.state.tx.us.
- IDENTIFY [who represents you](#) and load their contact information into your phone or computer.
- WATCH the TCA Advocacy Video on the [TCA YouTube Channel](#) to hone your advocacy skills.

Connect with us.

