

**Senate Executive Departments and Administration
Committee**
Kevin Condict 271-7875

SB 285, relative to changing the term "physician assistant" to "physician associate."

Hearing Date: March 19, 2025

Time Opened: 9:02 a.m. **Time Closed:** 9:24 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Pearl, McGough, Gannon, Altschiller and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill updates the laws to reflect the title change of "physician assistant" to "physician associate" but makes clear that no substantive change to any law is being made by this update.

Sponsors:

Sen. Rochefort

Sen. Long

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Murphy

Sen. Birdsell

Rep. Schmidt

Rep. Edwards

Rep. Layon

Who supports the bill: In total, **101** individuals signed in in support of SB 285. The full sign in sheets are available upon request to the Legislative Aide, Kevin Condict (kevin.condict@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill: In total, **5** individuals signed in in opposition to SB 285. The full sign in sheets are available upon request to the Legislative Aide, Kevin Condict (kevin.condict@gc.nh.gov).

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator David Rochefort, Senate District 1

- Sen. Rochefort introduced Senate Bill 285.
- Sen. Rochefort explained that SB 285 changes the term “physician assistant” (PA) to “physician associate” (PA) in state law, which aligns with the national and state PA associations’ new terminology. He said this change reflects the

independent role PAs have, clarifying that they are not just assistants to physicians.

- Sen. Rochefort said the amendment fixes an earlier citation issue and ensures that no other group can call themselves “physician assistants.”
- This bill does not change the scope of practice or require employers to use the new title.
- Sen. Altschiller asked about the language ensuring that no other group could claim the term “physician assistant.” She said she was looking specifically for if this is exclusionary language, and whether it would allow for future title changes or new competing titles. She emphasized the importance of clear, specific language to avoid confusion.
 - o Sen. Rochefort said that it was on page 2, line 1.
- Sen. Altschiller said she does not see that as exclusionary language.
 - o Sen. Rochefort said he is happy to include that language.
- Sen. McGough asked if the bill would affect reimbursement or open the door for third parties to make new claims. He inquired about whether educational programs like Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences had already switched to the “physician associate” terminology. He asked how many states have passed similar legislation and noted that this legislation was still in the early stages.
 - o Sen. Rochefort did not have direct answers to these questions, but that others would be able to answer those questions.

Sarah Leslie, New Hampshire Society of Physician Associates

- Ms. Leslie stated her support for SB 285.
- Ms. Leslie addressed the national shift to “physician associate.” She explained that HB 1222 in 2021 created a committee to study this change, and that this was the only recommendation of that committee.
- Ms. Leslie said this bill aligns terminology in state law with the national shift, as well as addressing misunderstandings about the role of PAs. This change is to clear up misconceptions that PAs only assist physicians, as they have their own scope of practice.
- Ms. Leslie emphasized that this bill does not elevate PAs to physicians or change their scope of practice.
- Ms. Leslie pointed out that the existing law already restricts the title of “physician assistant” to graduates of accredited programs, which makes additional exclusionary language unnecessary.
- Sen. Altschiller asked Ms. Leslie if, as a practicing PA, she was comfortable with the lack of exclusionary language.

- Ms. Leslie agreed that an exclusionary statement would be helpful to clarify that only those graduating from accredited programs can hold the title of “physician assistant.”
- Sen. McGough asked about the status of educational programs in New Hampshire and other states transitioning to the “physician associate” title.
 - Ms. Leslie noted that programs in New Hampshire, such as Franklin Pierce, are waiting for state law to change before making the switch.

Maura Weston, New Hampshire Medical Society

- Ms. Weston explained that the New Hampshire Medical Society (NHMS) represents two thousand New Hampshire physicians. The NHMS opposes SB 285.
- Ms. Weston expressed concerns about potential confusion due to educational programs still using “physician assistant” and federal law continuing to use the term.
- Ms. Weston said the NHMS felt that the change would disrupt the current system and create unnecessary confusion. She recommended that New Hampshire wait to see how other states handle the issue.
- Sen. Altschiller asked what criteria the NHMS would look for before supporting this change, and whether they prefer to wait until more states adopt the change.
 - Ms. Weston suggested a “wait and see” approach, citing concerns about terminology in training programs, federal law, and insurance.

Michael Bartlett, American Academy of Physician Associates

- Mr. Bartlett stated that he supports SB 285. He argued that the current system already confuses patients about the role of PAs.
- Mr. Bartlett expressed the belief that changing the title to “physician associate” will better reflect the education, training, and scope of practices of PAs.
- Mr. Bartlett emphasized that the title change would clarify the role of PAs in healthcare.