

**[SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATORS RE
PSYCHOLOGIST PRESCRIBING]**

[Please revise and personalize this letter! Use office or personal stationery.]

[Date]

Assemblyman or Assemblywoman] _____
[Trenton office address]

Re: A2892

Dear Honorable _____

As your constituent, I am writing to express my strong opposition to legislation that would allow psychologists to prescribe all medications including psychotropics here in New Jersey. I expect that you will hear a series of misleading arguments for why it should be considered. Please consider the following as you are heavily lobbied to support a proposal that is bad public policy:

- Access to care problems are often alleged among the reasons to approve this legislation. There are plenty of access issues in our health care system that should indeed be addressed, including the need for health insurance coverage for more citizens, and better insurance reimbursement policies. Allowing psychologists to prescribe powerful medication to a very vulnerable population after an inadequate training program does nothing to solve access to care problems. In addition, does the data support that there is a shortage of psychiatrists in general psychiatry? No there isn't a shortage based on practice locations. Furthermore, the solution for a shortage of psychiatrists is collaboration between adult psychiatrists and family physicians and between pediatricians and child and adolescent psychiatrists. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education requires that family medicine residents and pediatric residents receive training in mental disorders, diagnosis of mental disorders, and psychopharmacology in addition to the training in psychiatry including human behavior and psychopharmacology that they received in medical school.
- Patient safety concerns are the most compelling reason to oppose this legislation. Although psychologists are highly qualified professionals in many respects, their education is in behavioral and social sciences. Psychiatrists are physicians who are educated in medical science. Psychologists do not get the clinical education and experience to enable them to prescribe safely by taking 400 hours of courses from a remote location . This training does not compare with being immersed in 8 years of full time post college education (4 years medical school and 4 years

residency) including 12,000 – 16,000 patient care hours under supervision that is required to become a psychiatrist. There is additional training via fellowships for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Geriatric Psychiatry, Pain Management, Psychosomatic Psychiatry, and Addiction Psychiatry. In addition, psychiatrists are required to participate in an additional 150 Continuing Medical Education (CME) hours every three years

- Only two states have approved psychologist prescribing, despite years of intense activity funded and encouraged by the American Psychological Association. Louisiana and New Mexico approved it in 2004 and 2002, respectively. Since we are in the beginning of this public experiment, there is absolutely no track record that shows that psychologists can prescribe potent brain medications safely and effectively to patients with serious psychiatric illnesses. In addition, many patients that require psychotropic medications are also receiving treatment for general medical conditions that need to be considered in using psychotropic medications, especially regarding drug interactions. Only physicians including psychiatrists have the training and experience via medical school and residency to diagnose and treat these general medical conditions.

Although there are other points to be made, these alone should be considered significant enough to demand cautious and deliberate examination of the arguments used to promote this ill-advised legislation. I urge you to oppose psychologist prescribing in New Jersey.

Please know that I truly appreciate the time and energy demanded of those in public service. I am more than happy to discuss this *or* other issues if you desire.

Sincerely,

[Place of New Jersey Residence]