

# SB 822 (Aanestad)

## Prescriptive Authority for Psychologists

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one factor contributing to low rates of treatment and services for people with mental illnesses are the lack of qualified psychiatrists and other mental health providers in many parts of the country. There is compelling evidence that the nation's supply of psychiatrists is shrinking, and that access to treatment with psychiatrists is particularly limited for lower-income individuals who rely on public mental health systems for treatment and services.

With the continuing decline of the number of physicians who are choosing psychiatry as a medical profession, it is critical that California take steps to improve care for its public. California Psychologists with appropriate training should be authorized to prescribe medications for the treatment of mental illness so they can offer their clients greater options and more effective treatment for mental illness.

### Current Law

Business and Professions Code 2903 defines Psychology as the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment, of psychological problems and emotional and mental disorders. California psychologists currently work in private practice, hospitals, government agencies, university and research settings, schools, community clinics, and businesses.

Psychologists in California are allowed to admit and discharge hospital patients, and lead treatment teams in hospitals for patient care planning. Business and Professions Code Section 2914.3 authorizes the California Board of Psychology to encourage graduate schools to include psychopharmacology training in their curriculum and to encourage licensed psychologists to take continuing education courses in psychopharmacology and biological basis of behavior.

SB 822 (Aanestad) would allow psychologists to prescribe medication for the treatment of mental illness after:

- Completion of two years additional education in Psychopharmacology
- Completion of a one year supervised clinical internship
- Passage of a National Exam

### A Mental Health Crisis

- About 1 in 4 adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.
- 1 in 17 suffer from a serious mental illness.
- Mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15-44.  
*-National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)*
- The 1999 Surgeon General's report revealed that **less than one-third of all people with a diagnosable mental disorder in the U.S. receive treatment in a given year.**
- There are approximately 4,000 Psychiatrists<sup>1</sup> in CA for 37 million residents, as opposed to nearly 16,000 Psychologists<sup>2</sup> that are licensed by state of CA.  
*-<sup>1</sup>Board of Medical Specialties, 02/07 <sup>2</sup>CA Department of Consumer Affairs, Board of Psychology. 12/06*
- 49 California counties have at least one Federal Mental Health Professional Shortage area.
- A psychiatric residency is only chosen by 3% of an average medical school student body.  
*-National Residency Matching Program data*
- Only 17% of medications for mental disorders are prescribed by a Psychiatrist.  
*-American Journal of Psychiatry*
- A recent study found that **two-thirds of children prescribed mental health drugs by their family doctor never saw a mental health specialist.**  
*-Reported by AP, 8/8/06*
- Yet, multiple studies have demonstrated that for most mental health problems, a combination of psychotherapy and drug therapy is the most effective treatment.  
*-e.g., Keller, M.B., McCullough, J. P., & Klein, D. N., A comparison of nefazodone, the cognitive behavioral-analysis system of psychotherapy, and their combination for the treatment of chronic depression.*  
*-Josiah Macy, Jr., Foundation., Modern Psychiatry: Challenges in Educating Health Professionals to Meet New Needs.*