

Georgia Chiropractic Laws May Get an Adjustment

STATE SENATE TO EXAMINE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Editorial Staff

The Georgia Senate, responding to concerns that the state's chiropractic laws are "woefully outdated" and "unduly restrictive," has voted unanimously to create a committee that will examine the laws and determine whether any changes to the existing legislation are necessary to further the progress of the chiropractic profession. The committee, to be composed of five members of the Senate, will study the state of chiropractic in Georgia, and has until Dec. 31, 2004 to issue a report of its findings and recommendations.

Georgia was one of the early pioneers of chiropractic legislation, enacting a chiropractic licensure law along with six other states in 1921. (New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Iowa, South Dakota, Arizona and New Mexico passed similar laws that year.) Over the past 83 years, the number of chiropractors practicing in the state has increased dramatically; According to the Georgia Board of Chiropractic Examiners Web site, there are an estimated 3,100 licensed chiropractors in Georgia.

Yet while the number of doctors practicing chiropractic has grown by leaps and bounds, the laws pertaining to the practice of chiropractic have not. Although the state's chiropractic practice act has been amended numerous times over the years, it still includes outdated terms such as "electric X-ray photography," and does not include various diagnostic procedures most chiropractors learn in a contemporary educational setting.

Senate Resolution 680 is an attempt to solve the problems with the state's chiropractic laws in a meaningful, non threatening manner. Rather than introducing legislation that calls for an increased scope of practice for chiropractic (which could be tabled or even voted down by the legislature), the resolution sets up a system whereby legislators can hold hearings about the scope of practice, get input from members of the chiropractic profession as to which parts of the law need to be modified, and use that information to craft a law that serves the best interests of all parties involved.

The text of Senate Resolution 680 is as follows:

A RESOLUTION

Creating the Senate Study Committee on the Scope of Chiropractic Practice; and for other purposes.

WHEREAS, current state laws governing the licensing of doctors of chiropractic are woefully outdated, not having been substantially modernized since 1921; and

WHEREAS, the antiquated and unduly restrictive licensing law has caused many problems, including the recent highly publicized problems of Life University; and

WHEREAS, under the current law, doctors of chiropractic are unable to practice fully in

accordance with their education, training, and experience; and

WHEREAS, the Georgia Board of Chiropractic Examiners has difficulty regulating their profession due to the inadequacies of the current licensing law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that there is created the Senate Study Committee on the Scope of Chiropractic Practice to be composed of five members of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Assignments. The Senate Committee on Assignments shall designate a member of the committee as chairperson of the committee. The chairperson shall call all meetings of the committee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee shall undertake a study of the conditions, needs, issues, and problems mentioned above or related thereto and recommend any actions or legislation which the committee deems necessary or appropriate. The committee may conduct such meetings at such places and at such times as it may deem necessary or convenient to enable it to exercise fully and effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes of this resolution. The members of the committee shall receive the allowances authorized for legislative members of interim legislative committees but shall receive the same for not more than ten days unless additional days are authorized. The funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this resolution shall come from the funds appropriated to the Senate. In the event the committee makes a report of its findings and recommendations, with suggestions for proposed legislation, if any, such report shall be made on or before December 31, 2004. The committee shall stand abolished on December 31, 2004.

Dynamic Chiropractic invited Georgia's two largest chiropractic membership organizations, the Georgia Chiropractic Association (GCA) and the Georgia Chiropractic Council (GCC), to comment on Senate Resolution 680:

Statement from GCC President Dr. Greg Baker

"As the president of a state chiropractic organization that maintains a more conservative and traditional interpretation of our profession, I have an obligation to our members to develop and/or support laws that are aligned with this position. I also realize that ours is not the only interpretation, and as members of a larger chiropractic community, it is necessary to work with other members of our profession, including the Georgia Chiropractic Association, to ensure that any changes to the law address our common needs.

"Although we will consider any suggested changes to our laws, we feel that there are issues that are fundamental to the practice of chiropractic that must be considered. First, it is important to maintain our right to care for patients for the correction of the vertebral subluxation regardless of the symptoms of the patient. Next, we want to preserve the right of our patients to have direct access to our offices without the need for referral from another provider. Additionally, we believe it is important that chiropractic maintain its unique identity apart from the medical profession. At a minimum, this would preclude the use of drugs and surgery.

"It will take a number of months to conclude this legislative collaboration between our two state associations, and we are optimistic that we can reach mutually agreed-upon recommendations to present to this historic state legislative study committee."

Release from the Georgia Chiropractic Association

"The Georgia Chiropractic Association is excited about the formation of a Senate Study Committee on Chiropractic. Many of the association's members contributed to making this reality. This new

committee has been charged to hold formal hearings on the need to change the chiropractic scope of practice act.

"The hearing process provides a context for chiropractors to collectively decide what is wanted and needed in a practice act that is commensurate with modern chiropractic education. The ensuing debate will clarify positions both for and against changes in the law. It will be revealing and helpful to legislators and all other parties to hear the rationale for each side of the issue.

"Very strong efforts are being made to engage the professional community, including many outside the association. Concerted effort will be required for success,' commented GCA President Robert A. Hayden, DC, PhD. 'We may never have unity of opinion in chiropractic, but we can and must achieve unity of purpose.'

"It is anticipated that with five days of hearings instead of the usual five minutes of testimony allowed during a typical committee meeting, legislators will learn what chiropractic actually is. Additionally, they will see not only what chiropractors do now, but also what these learned health care professionals could do if the law permitted them to serve patients to their full capabilities. Hopes are high that the senate study committee affords the best opportunity to advance our profession since the original act was passed in 1921."

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