



Governor Raimondo Signs Bill to License Naturopathic Doctors in Rhode Island

Providence, Rhode Island

On August 17, 2017, Governor Gina Raimondo signed into law a bill to provide licensure for Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) in Rhode Island, thus ensuring the safe practice of naturopathic medicine. The bill was passed unanimously by both the State Senate and State House of Representatives in June. Support for this bill was largely provided by many grateful patients, industry leaders, and other healthcare professionals. The passage of this bill marks an important step for naturopathic medicine in Rhode Island, as residents will now have access to licensed in-state care.

The Rhode Island law affords the people of Rhode Island an option to include medically-educated and trained naturopathic doctors on their health care team, allowing greater access to NDs' expertise in both preventive medicine and natural integrative care. Naturopathic doctors are rigorously trained in post-graduate, four-year, in-residence, regionally and nationally accredited naturopathic medical schools. Following the second and fourth years of schooling, naturopathic medical board examinations are administered and must be passed prior to eligibility for licensure. NDs are also required to complete industry-standard continuing education coursework.

M Feibelman, ND, President of the Rhode Island Association of Naturopathic Physicians (RIANP) reports, "I, along with my colleagues in Rhode Island and across the country, look forward to the opportunity to join the ranks of licensed health care providers in the Ocean State. I applaud Governor Raimondo and the legislative process that studied and vetted this profession and came to understand the unique role that licensed NDs can play in the state."

The bill also signifies the licensure of NDs in all of New England. Nearly all New England states have licensed NDs for over 20 years, and in Massachusetts, Governor Charlie Baker signed a similar bill into law earlier this year. "Rhode Island is the third state to gain licensure within the last 12 months. Governor Wolf of Pennsylvania signed a bill into law in November of 2016, bringing the number of states and jurisdictions that recognize naturopathic medicine to 23," states Cathy Picard, ND, of North Smithfield.

The licensure of NDs in all New England states reflects a paradigm shift in attitudes and acceptance of natural and integrative medicine. Numerous naturopathic institutions are recipients of National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding and other grants to advance medical research. Naturopathic doctors have been awarded competitive NIH fellowships. The scientific rigor applied to the evaluation of empirically based nutritional, botanical, and other naturopathic treatments is increasingly recognized.

Sheila M. Frodermann, MS, ND, DHANP, past President and current Treasurer of the RIANP, furthers, “Naturopathic doctors are primed and eager to bring evidence-based medicine and expertise to the Rhode Island public, both in private clinics and in professional arenas such as education, research, and public health. This is an amazing opportunity for the expansion of integrative medicine.” Adds Steven Zarembka, ND, “With the increasing interest in natural medicine, it's a swift step in the right direction to allow Rhode Islanders access to credentialed naturopathic doctors who are truly at the forefront of evidence-based natural therapies.”

In licensed states, NDs work collaboratively with allied health providers through private practice, integrative clinics and health care centers, as well as in clinics that care for the underserved. Rhode Island patients will now be able to safely access the skills and expertise of NDs in the Ocean State. Kathleen Cannon, ND, states, “As an integrative healthcare model becomes more widespread, the recognition and licensure of our profession allows us to work more fully in our capacities while collaborating with other medical professionals to optimize treatment and health outcomes for each individual patient.”

“We have a long history in licensed states of providing safe and effective care. In the weeks leading up to Governor Raimondo’s signing of this bill, high level state politicians, Secretaries of Health and Human Services, and members of Departments of Public Health from other licensed states weighed in with their positive experiences with naturopathic medicine in their respective states,” adds Chrysanthi Kazantzis, ND, MS, Vice President of the RIANP. In addition, leaders from the business world, medical researchers along with medical doctors, and other allied health professionals contacted Governor Raimondo urging the signing of this bill.

The importance of patient safety is reflected in this bill. “Prior to the passage of this bill, anyone could call themselves a naturopathic doctor whether that person received the appropriate education and training at an accredited naturopathic medical school or not. There was no legal distinction nor protection for patients,” comments Erica LePore, ND, of North Kingstown. This law protects public health by enabling Rhode Islanders to understand the credentials of practitioners seen.

Licensed naturopathic care in Rhode Island also supports the state economy in terms of both patient care and professional retention. Kazantzis states, "I am a Rhode Island native, having attended Barrington public schools and then the University of Rhode Island. After graduating from naturopathic medical school, my goal was to return to Rhode Island to practice, but I decided to stay in Connecticut as Rhode Island was not licensed at the time. The impact of licensure influenced my career decision, and I am glad that I now have the opportunity to practice in my native state and allow citizens of RI to make the choice for safe, effective, and cost-saving health care."

The Rhode Island Association of Naturopathic Physicians (RIANP) is the professional association representing licensable naturopathic doctors in the Ocean State. For further information, including to find an ND near you and to learn about the upcoming Naturopathic Medicine Week, please visit www.rianp.org.