



777 East Park Drive
P.O. Box 8820
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8820

(877) ER-DOC-PA
info@pacep.net
www.pacep.net

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May 8, 2019

Dear State Legislator:

On behalf of the Pennsylvania College of Emergency Physicians (PACEP) and our over 1700 members, I wish to commend the State Legislature for considering HR 268, which directs the Joint State Government Commission to study the impact of the Commonwealth's behavioral health system on our emergency departments and patient health. PACEP strongly supports this resolution and is prepared to recommend members to serve on the advisory committee as envisioned in the legislative text. Pennsylvania emergency physicians regularly care for patients in desperate need of acute psychiatric treatment who tragically have to wait hours or even days for definitive care. Such delays only harm patients and our capacity to provide care to all Pennsylvanians in emergency departments across the Commonwealth.

PACEP does recommend an amendment to the fourth Resolved to clarify the issue to be studied under this Resolution. Psychiatric boarding starts prior to a decision to admit a patient for inpatient care, including the availability of appropriate acute psychiatric triage evaluation resources, the processes for identifying available inpatient psychiatric beds, and the common need to transfer a patient to another facility for such inpatient psychiatric care, and earlier than a 24 hour time period. We would suggest that the Resolved be amended to read:

“RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission study the prevalence of psychiatric boarding, which encompasses the time period in a hospital emergency department after medical stabilization of a patient in need of psychiatric care and prior to the admission or transfer of that patient to an inpatient psychiatric bed.”

Thank you for your efforts in addressing the behavioral health crisis in the Commonwealth. PACEP stands ready to work with the Legislature in helping all Pennsylvanians receive the quality emergency and behavioral health care they deserve.

Sincerely,

Arvind Venkat, MD, FACEP
President, Pennsylvania College of Emergency Physicians