

2024 House of Delegates Government Affairs Report Claudine Leone



NJAFP Government Affairs continues to be actively engaged in state policy in Trenton. The NJ Legislature ended its two-year session in January where we achieved several successes. The new 2024-2025 legislative session has started and NJAFP continues to advocate for its legislative and advocacy priorities: payment reforms/hassle factors, scope of practice expansions, primary care workforce/loan redemption, and primary care investment.

Key Legislative Successes in 2023

- **Telemedicine Pay Parity:** NJAFP successfully advocated for a one year extension for pay parity for telemedicine for physical and behavioral health. This followed a two-year extension of COVID-era pay parity that was due to expire in December 2023. NJAFP's goal is to make telemedicine pay parity permanent in New Jersey by the end of 2024.
- **Physician Choice of Payment by Plans:** NJAFP supported legislation signed by Governor Murphy that would prevent health plans from exclusively issuing payment on virtual prepaid credit cards, an increasing practice that comes with high fees imposed on practices. Under the new law, payers will be required to offer all available methods of payment, including but not limited to payment by check or electronic funds transfer.
- **Prior Authorization Reforms:** NJAFP supported legislation signed by Governor Murphy working with our Coalition of physician specialties which covers all state regulated plans, except Medicaid. The law shortens health plans' response time for prior authorization requests for medications and diagnostics/procedures. One key change requires plans to ensure a physician in your specialty is responsible for the review of an appeal to a negative prior authorization decision.
- **Primary Care Loan Redemption Program Reforms:** NJAFP had legislation introduced with Assembly Majority Leader Greenwald to reform the program and make it easier to access for both new primary care physicians and for practices to become approved sites to hire them. While we got the bill far along in the legislative process, we were unable to get it to the Governor's desk in 2023. However, as a result of our vocal advocacy the Program's funding was increased through the 2023 budget process to from \$1.5 to \$2.5 million and the loan redemption amount was increased from \$120,000 to \$200,000 for a four-year commitment working in a medically underserved community.

Success Often Comes in the Form of STOPPING Bad Policy

- **Scope of Practice Legislation:** Without NJAFP and physician advocacy stopping multiple bills in Trenton from passing last session, advanced practice nurses would be able to

practice in all specialties of medicine independently without any physician involvement, CRNAs would be authorized to work without a supervising anesthesiologist, and optometrists would be able to perform laser eye surgery. Access to care continues to be the mantra of non-physicians seeking to legislatively advance their scope of practice in New Jersey. We expect these efforts to continue into 2024.

What NJAFP's Working on for 2024-2025

- **Telemedicine:** NJAFP working with Assemblyman Conaway and Senator Gopal had legislation introduced in January 2024 to make pay parity for physical and behavioral health permanent for state regulated health plans. We expect committee hearings by June 2024 to move this legislation along. NJDOH is also expected to release a report issued evaluating pay parity for telemedicine since COVID.
- **Medical Debt and Collections:** There is significant interest in the Murphy Administration to address collections practices for medical debt for patients. However, legislation introduced would significantly impact physician practices and health care facilities' ability to bill, collect, and sell medical debt under certain circumstances. NJAFP is working with MSNJ and other organizations to seek amendments to this legislation.
- **Primary Care Investment:** NJAFP continues to advocate for New Jersey to adopt a policy prioritizing an increased primary care investment for state regulated health plans, including Medicaid. Working with a grant from AAFP and partnership with NJ Health Care Quality Institute, NJAFP continues to educate policy makers on the importance of investing in primary care, but it has been an uphill battle.
- **Medicaid Parity with Medicare:** NJAFP working with the NJ Psychiatric Association, MSNJ, and the NJ Health Care Quality Institute is advocating for Medicaid-Medicare parity for primary care and behavioral health services. We were successful getting this legislation through committees in both houses in 2023, however, it was determined to be too costly and failed to pass the Legislature. This legislation was reintroduced and NJAFP and our partners are continuing to press for this legislation in 2024.
- **Primary Care Loan Redemption Bill:** The saga continues with NJAFP trying to get legislation passed that will make it easier for practices to qualify as authorized sites to hire new physicians under the program. Assemblyman Greenwald has reintroduced this legislation and we will continue to promote it in 2024.

NJAFP as a Key Stakeholder and Advocacy Resource

NJAFP continues to be the go to physician specialty organization on all things primary care for both the media and for policy makers. Here are some examples:

- **Dr. Sally Mravcak**, NJAFP President, was invited to meet with NJDOH Commissioner Kaitlan Baston, a family physician, to discuss recent outbreaks of Measles and Mumps and request NJAFP assist in disseminating key communications to our members from NJDOH and CDC.
- **Media inquiries** from NJ Spotlight News, NJ.com, Advanced Media, NJ PBS, NorthJersey.com, WCBS 880 Newsradio, and others.

- **Dr. Sally Mravcak**, NJAFP President, was interviewed several times through 2023 on the increased presence and utilization of urgent care centers in New Jersey.
- **NJAFP leaders** have responded to media requests focusing on NJ's primary care workforce, most recently focusing on a report released by the NJ Health Care Quality Institute and developed by a working group that included NJAFP's family physician members: Drs. Mary Campagnolo, Tom McCarrick, and Al Tallia.

New Jersey has Three Physician Legislators in Trenton!

- **Assemblyman and Dr. Herb Conaway**, a general internal medicine physician, continues to be a valuable advocate for medicine in Trenton as Chair of the Assembly Committee and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly.
- **Assemblywoman and Dr. Margie Donlon**, a physiatrist, was recently elected and started her term in January 2024. Dr. Donlon is a member of the Assembly Health Committee
- **Assemblyman and Dr. John Azzariti**, an anesthesiologist, was recently elected and started his term in January 2024. Dr. Azzariti is a member of the Assembly Health Committee.

10+ Years of Collaboration with Other Physician Specialties

NJAFP continues its collaboration in Trenton with 18 physician specialty organizations through the Access to Care Coalition. This partnership began over 10 years ago when we discovered we had more in common with advocacy priorities in Trenton. The Coalition has focused primarily in recent years on preventing scope of practice legislation by advanced practice providers seeking independent practice or increased scope of practice into the practice of medicine. The lobbyists representing these organizations meet weekly to discuss health care policy and pending legislation to see where we may support each other's advocacy interests.

For more information please contact me at claudine@njgac.com.

Claudine Leone