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## Illinois House Bill Protects Physician Mental Health

### Dr. Greenberg:

Welcome to *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. I'm your host, Dr. Michael Greenberg, and joining me today is anesthesiologist and Illinois House Representative Dr. Bill Hauter. We'll be discussing Illinois House Bill 3109, which will limit mental health questions for physician licensure.

Bill, thanks for joining us today.

### Dr. Hauter:

Well, thank you for having me.

### Dr. Greenberg:

So before we dive into House Bill 3109, Bill, could you tell us what mental health questions have previously been required on physician license applications?

### Dr. Hauter:

Well, the general sense is that these questions have been intrusive and invasive and have looked at your past. It's not really necessary. And so what we tried to do is to bring it into the current practice of medicine, your current mental health issues, and how they deal with in regard to your current practice, and so we took away some of the stigmatization that you have looking at your past; and also, we took away some of the deterrents that you would have to report mental health issues in the future or getting treatment because you didn't want to have those questions that you would have to answer. So by taking them out, of the licensing for physicians and other healthcare professionals, it took away that stigmatization of the past, and also, deterrent from seeking help in the future.

### Dr. Greenberg:

So were physicians actually having their licenses not being issued because questions about maybe a teenage depressive episode or something like that?

### Dr. Hauter:

We had heard stories of that. It's really hard to pin that down, but we had heard stories of that, and how would you feel if you had to reveal something that you had to, maybe an issue of depression 10 years ago that had now resolved but you had to reveal that currently. And then going forward, how would you feel about getting help for some issue that you may have and thinking, "Well, I may have to disclose this to the State or to my hospital or to society," or whatever that may be, "to my employer." And so just as taking away a future deterrent from people seeking care, I thought it made a lot of sense.

### Dr. Greenberg:

Yeah. So it's really important now to remove these questions, is that correct?

**Dr. Hauter:**

So what we're trying to do is have it conform to the standards of the ADA. They don't go into your past history and things that are very extraneous and not important to the license at hand, and so this is what Illinois House Bill 3109 does. It just focuses questions related to mental health of healthcare professionals. It focuses those questions on current mental health and how it applies to your current practice, and it doesn't look at all at your past history and ask questions that are intrusive or invasive about your past mental health history.

**Dr. Greenberg:**

Right. And you should not be penalized because in your past you had an issue with mental health.

**Dr. Hauter:**

Absolutely.

**Dr. Greenberg:**

So Bill, how much support was there among your colleagues? And what are the hopes for this new bill? Has it been signed yet?

**Dr. Hauter:**

It passed the Senate, it passed the House all unanimously. It's awaiting the governor's signature. I expect him to sign it. It was very well supported all through. I had no opposition. Illinois State Medical Society was very helpful in helping write the bill, and the Illinois Society of Anesthesiologists, which I have been an officer in that organization, as well as Dr. Barbara Jericho who spearheaded this and gave me the idea to bring this forward. We're all behind it, so I had a lot of support. And people saw that it made a lot of sense, and we're hoping that this trickles down into hospital credentialing and all sorts of levels of credentialing, and even maybe nonhealthcare professionals, nurses, also other healthcare professionals, as well as nonhealthcare professionals will not be asked intrusive and invasive and really just unnecessary mental health questions in the future.

**Dr. Greenberg:**

For those just tuning in, you're listening to *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Michael Greenberg, and I'm speaking with Dr. Bill Hauter about Illinois House Bill 3109.

So, Bill, now that we have some background on the bill, are there any further steps that need to be taken to address physician mental health?

**Dr. Hauter:**

Well, that's a good question. I'm not saying that I'm the expert on mental health or health care, but I do see this as an issue that, to me, it made sense. The other issue that I've always been really interested in is addiction and how we deal with addiction and overdose issues as an anesthesiologist, and I'm also board certified in emergency medicine, and I've worked in emergency medicine for over 25 years now as well. I've had the opportunity to work with a lot of overdose situations, emergency situations having to do with drugs, and drug overdose and addiction and how that affects all of society, so that's something I'm very interested in. I believe that this all has to do with mental health and drug abuse and addiction and all that comes under mental health, and so those are other areas I'm interested in.

And your career shouldn't be thrown away if you have had an addiction problem because we have avenues to help physicians now, and there's great programs out there. And so that has been something that I've always been interested in, and I think that's going to be my next area we're going to look into and how we can better help physicians and all sorts of people in our country that are struggling with addiction. And we see what the fentanyl crisis has done and overdose deaths have just absolutely skyrocketed, and so that's an area of just critical that we address quickly.

**Dr. Greenberg:**

This is certainly an enormously important topic, and I want to thank my guest, Dr. Bill Hauter, for his work in the field and sharing his insights with us today.

Bill, it was a pleasure speaking with you.

**Dr. Hauter:**

Well, thank you very much. Thank you for setting this all up. It was my pleasure, and I hope people will look up these bills and see what they're all about. And they can also get a hold of me at my e-mail if you go to ILGA.gov, it has all the members' e-mail addresses and all the information about these bills, so it's one way to look things up. I would love to hear from physicians and healthcare professionals if there's something that they have. This was an idea brought forward by another physician, and I took it up in the statehouse, but anybody else has other ideas, I'd love to hear them because we're in a position to make some things happen.

**Dr. Greenberg:**

For ReachMD, I'm Dr. Michael Greenberg. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit [ReachMD.com/CliniciansRoundtable](https://ReachMD.com/CliniciansRoundtable) where you can Be Part of the Knowledge, and we thank you for listening.