May 10, 2017

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher
Chair, Assembly Committee on Appropriations
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1589 (Bocanegra) as amended 05/09/17 - SUPPORT

Dear Chairwoman Gonzalez Fletcher:

The California Retailers Association (CRA) and the National Association of Chain Drugs Stores (NACDS) are pleased to support AB 1589, proposes a long overdue increase to the pharmacy technician ratio. This bill will remove the operational constraints of the existing ratio (1:1, 3:2), and allow up to four technicians to support a pharmacist in the dispensing functions of a pharmacy. AB 1589 is especially timely since the pharmacy profession in California has made significant progress from the time the ratio was modified in 2001 (AB 536, Bates).

Landmark legislation approved in 2013 (SB 493, Hernandez) expanded the scope of practice for pharmacists. The bill authorized pharmacists to provide consultation on drug therapy, immunizations to patients 3 years and older, and to obtain Advanced Practice Pharmacist (APP) recognition. Pharmacists may also furnish certain medications such as self-administered hormonal contraceptives, tobacco cessation products, travel medications, and naloxone. Still, despite all the efforts to enable more patient interaction with pharmacists, the pharmacy technician ratio remains unchanged, leaving pharmacies burdened with balancing these new authorizations while maintaining dispensing functions. As a result, progress has been stymied.

Changes in the pharmacy technician ratios are not unprecedented. Over half of the nation has more flexible ratios than California, with even 18 states and the District of Colombia having unspecified ratios. This leaves California in last place, offering only 1 pharmacy technician to 1 pharmacist and up to 2 technicians with an additional pharmacist. Other states have been comfortable in making these changes because of increased automation in the pharmacy field. Specifically, pharmacy technicians are using tablets, filling or sealing auger dose machines, and laboratory balances to ensure the accurate measures of medicine are provided. Computer software also assists pharmacy technicians for accounting, label making, and inventory, making their nondiscretionary responsibilities easier to accomplish with certainty. Moreover, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy created a
taskforce to review technician ratios in light of all the technological advancements. They found ratios no longer served the purpose they once did and can be safely eliminated so pharmacies may adjust the ratio according to their pharmacy’s needs.

California’s restrictive ratio contributes to the underutilization of our pharmacists. It limits their ability to provide more clinical services and direct patient care and also stifles workforce development for pharmacy technicians. Advancements in medicine will only continue to have a ripple effect. As patients begin to take advantage of basic healthcare services at community pharmacies, the demand for both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will rise. Increasing the amount of dispensing support pharmacists have compliments the advancements California has made in the pharmacy profession and provides greater opportunities for technicians in the State.

For these reasons, we support AB 1589. It is a timely measure to not only help maximize the use of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, but also increase access to valuable healthcare services in community pharmacies.

Sincerely,

Angie Manetti
Director, Government Affairs
CRA

Mary Staples, Director
State Government Affairs
NACDS

cc. Members, Assembly Appropriations Committee
   The Honorable Raul Bocanegra