

Statement Before the Pennsylvania Senate State Government Committee

In Support of Senate Bill 125

Delivered by Alfred S. Casale, MD, System Chief Medical Officer for Surgical Services; Chair of Geisinger Heart and Vascular Institute; Professor and Chair of Cardiovascular Medicine, Geisinger College of Health Sciences. Testifying on Behalf of the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania.

Good morning, Chairman Dush, Chairman Santarsiero, and members of the committee.

My name is Alfred Casale, and I serve as the System Chief Medical Officer for Surgical Services and as Chair of the Heart and Vascular Enterprise for Geisinger, an integrated health care delivery and insurance system serving more than one million Pennsylvanians across central, northern, and northeastern regions of our Commonwealth. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today in strong support of the special venue rule for medical liability claims that was rescinded by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in January 2023.

Impact on Access to Care

Since the Court's action, Geisinger and many other providers have witnessed the predictable resurgence of forum shopping—cases being filed in jurisdictions known for disproportionately large verdicts and high settlements. This concentration of litigation in venues distant from where an issue arose has immediate downstream effects on the cost of health care for us all. Malpractice premiums are once again climbing statewide, with rural and community hospitals—already financially vulnerable—bearing a disproportionate burden.

For Geisinger, which serves large rural populations across 47 counties, every additional dollar directed toward liability costs is a dollar taken away from patient care. These increased costs inevitably threaten our ability to sustain critical but low-margin services such as obstetrics, trauma, and behavioral health, particularly in our rural facilities where access is already fragile.

Impact on Recruitment and Retention

The 2023 repeal has also reintroduced uncertainty into physician recruitment. Geisinger employs and affiliates with thousands of clinicians, and our recruiters hear a consistent message: that Pennsylvania's liability environment is once again seen as unpredictable and hostile and this is deterring physicians—especially sorely needed specialists—from choosing to practice here.

Neighboring states like Ohio and Maryland now appear more stable and less risky to young physicians burdened with educational debt. This is not a theoretical concern. It directly undermines the Commonwealth's efforts to maintain and expand the clinical workforce needed to serve an aging and increasingly complex patient population.

Financial Pressures and Systemic Implications

The reinstatement of venue shopping is occurring at a particularly difficult financial moment for health systems. At Geisinger, we like so many others, are navigating tremendous pressures stemming from multiple converging factors:

- HR 1 and related federal policy changes have introduced new constraints, reimbursement reductions and important uncertainties.
- Demographic trends mean more Pennsylvanians are aging into Medicare and requiring higher-intensity care while the number of the working-age Pennsylvanians—and the premiums from their employer-based coverage—shrink.
- Escalating salary and workforce expenses—essential to retain nurses, technicians, advanced providers and physicians in a hyper-competitive labor market—are driving operating margins to their narrowest levels in decades.

Under these conditions, an increase in liability exposure is not simply another line item—it's a multiplier of financial instability. It drains resources from the very investments that keep great care accessible: modernizing facilities, expanding digital and rural health infrastructure, and sustaining our training and community health programs.

Conclusion

Reinstating the special venue rule will not limit a patient's right to seek justice. It will ensure that claims are heard where the alleged injury occurred, providing fairness, predictability, and stability to a system that serves all Pennsylvanians. The current environment jeopardizes access, discourages clinicians, and exacerbates the financial pressures already straining hospitals and insurers across the state.

On behalf of Geisinger's patients, employees, and communities, I urge you, who have been chosen to safeguard our health and welfare, to act swiftly to restore the special venue rule and preserve the balance that has long supported both justice and the sustainability of health care in Pennsylvania.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to protecting access to care for the people of this Commonwealth.