

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Health Policy

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BILL: SB 238

INTRODUCER: Senator Grimsley

SUBJECT: Medical Assistant Certification

DATE: October 27, 2015

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Rossitto-Van Winkle	Stovall	HP	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	_____	_____	AHS	_____
3.	_____	_____	FP	_____

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**I. Summary:**

SB 238 amends s. 458.3485(3), F.S., to remove a voluntary provision which recognized two certification organizations for medical assistants.

The bill is effective July 1, 2016.

**II. Present Situation:**

Medical Assistants (MAs) provide medical assistance under the direct supervision and responsibility of a physician. An MA is not a licensed profession in Florida.

Under such an arrangement, an MA may perform certain administrative and clinical procedures, including:

- Performing clinical procedures, such as:
  - Aseptic procedures;
  - Taking vital signs;
  - Preparing patients for the physician's care;
  - Performing venipunctures and nonintravenous injections; and
  - Observing and reporting patients' signs or symptoms.
- Administering basic first aid;
- Assisting with patient examinations or treatments;
- Operating office medical equipment;
- Collecting routine laboratory specimens as directed by the physician;
- Administering medication as directed by the physician;
- Performing basic laboratory procedures;
- Performing office procedures including all general administrative duties required by the physician; and

- Performing dialysis procedures, including home dialysis.<sup>1</sup>

According to the United States Department of Labor statistics, Florida has the third highest number of MAs in the country with 40,770.<sup>2</sup> The mean hourly wage is \$14.13 or an annual mean wage of \$29,400.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, the mean hourly wage is \$15.01 and mean annual wage is \$31,220 with the 90th percentile at \$20.56 and \$42,760, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Overwhelmingly, MAs find employment within the offices of physicians, health care practitioners, or medical and surgical hospitals.<sup>5</sup> In the next 10 years, job growth in this occupation is expected to increase by 29 percent nationally.<sup>6</sup>

### **Certification of Medical Assistants**

Under current Florida law, an MA is not required to be certified. The law, however, recognizes two certifying entities for MAs. An MA may be certified by either the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) or as a Registered Medical Assistant (RMA) by the American Medical Technologists (AMT).<sup>7</sup> Both of these organizations are non-profits, but only the AAMA certifies medical assistants exclusively.<sup>8</sup> At least two other organizations, both for-profits that also certify several allied health professions, offer certifications for medical assistants. The AAMA has offered exams the longest, since 1963.<sup>9</sup>

To be eligible for the AAMA certification examination, applicants must fall into one of three eligibility criteria:

- Completing student<sup>10</sup> or recent graduate<sup>11</sup> from a medical assisting program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Program (CAAHEP) or the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES);
- Non-recent graduate of a CAAHEP or ABHES accredited medical assisting program; or
- MA re-certificant.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 458.3485, F.S.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2014(31-9092 Medical Assistants)* <http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes319092.htm> (last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Projections (2012-2022)*, <http://data.bls.gov/projections/occupationProj> (last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Section 458.3485(3), F.S.

<sup>8</sup> American Association of Medical Assistants, *How the CMA (AAMA) stands apart*, <http://www.aama-ntl.org/docs/default-source/employers/cma-stands-apart.pdf?sfvrsn=10>, p. 1, (Updated May 2014) (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> A completing student may take the exam no more than 30 days prior to completing their formal education and practicum.

<sup>11</sup> Recent graduates are defined by the AAMA as those students who apply for the exam within 12 months of graduation.

<sup>12</sup> American Association of Medical Assistants, *Exam Eligibility Requirements*, <http://www.aama-ntl.org/cma-aama-exam/application-steps/eligibility> (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

The non-refundable fee for the examination is \$125. For non-recent graduates, or re-certificants who are not members of the AAMA, the examination fee is \$250.<sup>13</sup> In 2014, the AAMA reported over 75,000 MAs were credentialed through its organization.<sup>14</sup>

An accredited medical assisting program includes academic and clinical training in areas such as human anatomy, physiology, and pathology; medical terminology, record keeping and accounting; laboratory techniques; pharmacology; first aid; office practices and patient relations; and medical law and ethics.<sup>15</sup> A practicum or an unpaid, supervised on-site work experience in an ambulatory health care setting is also a required component of the certification process.<sup>16</sup>

Certifications are current for 60 months and may be re-certified through either re-examination or by continuing education.<sup>17</sup> Expired certifications greater than 60 months may only be re-certified through examination.<sup>18</sup>

The AMT is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agency (NCCA) through April 2018.<sup>19</sup> In its 2012-13 Annual Report, AMT reported certification of 38,518 members as RMAs.<sup>20</sup>

Certification for its nine different specialties through AMT may be accomplished through passage of the appropriate examinations and compliance with one of the following five pathways:

- Graduation from an accredited medical assisting program with a minimum of 720 clock hours, including 160 hours of clinical externship within the last 4 years of application for certification;
- Graduation of a formal medical services training program of the United States Armed Forces within 4 years of application for certification or if greater than 4 years from application, provide evidence of relevant work experience in 3 of the last 5 years prior to application;
- Employment as a medical assistant for a minimum of 5 out of the last 7 years with both clinical and administrative duties, no more than 2 years as an instructor in a post-secondary medical assistant program, and proof of high school graduation;
- Employment as an instructor in an accredited medical assisting program, completion of a course of instruction in healthcare discipline related to medical assisting that includes both clinical and administrative duties, and if the applicant has less than 3 years teaching experience, but more than 1 year, documentation of at least 3 years of clinical experience in a healthcare profession in which the scope is equal to the medical assisting scope of practice; or

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<sup>13</sup> American Association of Medical Assistants, *Exam Application Steps*, <http://www.aama-ntl.org/cma-aama-exam/application-steps#.VhPzIE3ot9A> (last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> American Association of Medical Assistants, *History - 2014*, <http://www.aama-ntl.org/about/history> (last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> American Association of Medical Assistants, *CAAHEP and ABHEP Accredited Programs*, <http://www.aama-ntl.org/medical-assisting/caahep-abhes-programs#.VhLZRk3ot9A> (last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> American Medical Technologies, *Recertification Policies*, <http://www.aama-ntl.org/continuing-education/recertification-policies#.VhPxp3ot9A> (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> American Medical Technologies, *2012-13 Annual Report*, [http://www.americanmedtech.org/Portals/0/PDF/AMTIE-About%20Us/About%20Us/AMT\\_2013AnnualRpt\\_web.pdf](http://www.americanmedtech.org/Portals/0/PDF/AMTIE-About%20Us/About%20Us/AMT_2013AnnualRpt_web.pdf) p. 6, (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 11.

- Passage of another certification examination that has been approved by the AMT Board of Directors and the applicant has meet one of the other eligibility routes.<sup>21</sup>

The application fee, exam cost, and initial annual fee is \$100.<sup>22</sup> RMAs are required to maintain their certifications through an annual fee. The current fee is \$50.<sup>23</sup>

At least two other organizations certify MAs, the National Healthcareer Association (NHA) and the National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT). Under the NHA, individuals who have completed a training program for a Medical Assistant and have graduated high school qualify to take the certification examination for a Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA).<sup>24</sup> The examination fee is \$149. A certification is valid for 2 years and must be maintained through continuing education credits of at least 10 credit hours every certification cycle.<sup>25</sup>

The National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) is also accredited by the NCCA and offers three mechanisms for eligibility for exam eligibility:

- Current or graduated student in a Medical Assistant program from an NCCT authorized school within the past 5 years;
- Two years of verifiable full-time experience as a Medical Assistant practitioner within the past 5 years; or
- Completion of Medical Assistant training or its equivalent during U.S. Military service within the past 5 years.<sup>26</sup>

Examination fees through the NCCT vary based on the route taken by the applicant. For current students, graduates testing within 6 months of graduation date, and military, the examination cost is \$90. For all other applicants, the examination cost is \$135.<sup>27</sup> Annual recertification is required and includes both a recertification fee and the completion of continuing education courses. Fourteen clock hours are required each year per certification.<sup>28</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

**Section 1** repeals subsection (3) of s. 458.3485, F.S., to remove the voluntary certification provision through the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) or as a Registered Medical Assistant by the American Medical Technologists. The statute would be silent as to

<sup>21</sup> American Medical Technologists, *Medical Assistant*, <http://www.americanmedtech.org/GetCertified/RMAEligibility.aspx> See Route 5: Other Recognized Exam (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> American Medical Technologies, *Stay Certified*, <http://www.americanmedtech.org/StayCertified.aspx> (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> National Healthcareer Association Candidate Handbook, <http://www.nhanow.com/docs/default-source/pdfs/handbooks/nha-candidate-handbook.pdf?sfvrsn=2>, p. 8, (Last visited Oct.27, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> *Supra* note 24 at 31.

<sup>26</sup> National Center for Competency Testing, *Medical Assistant (NCMA)*, <https://www.nctinc.com/Certifications/MA.aspx> (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> National Center for Competency Testing, *Examination Fees*, <https://www.nctinc.com/documents/ExamFees.pdf> (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> National Center for Competency Testing, *Guide to the Re-Certification Process*, p. 4, <https://www.nctinc.com/Documents/Guide%20to%20the%20Recertification%20Process.pdf> (Last visited Oct. 27, 2015).

certification or to the identification of any specific certification organization for medical assistants.

The bill is effective July 1, 2016.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Removal of a reference to two specific voluntary, certification programs in statute may expand the number of individuals who choose the other certification organizations that were not named in the statute that also certify medical assistants. Even though the certification was voluntary, the removal of the reference may still have an impact on those organizations that were either named or not named in the provision.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill amends section 458.3485 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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