

History of CAA's in the State of South Carolina

By: Koty Price, President of SC-AAA and Ellen Allinger

The AA practice in the state unofficially began in 1999 with a couple of AA's being hired under physician delegatory authority or through other prior arrangements. Once the nurse anesthetists discovered this was taking place, the South Carolina Association of Nurse Anesthetists (SCANA) filed a complaint with the South Carolina State Medical Board in early 2000 allegedly stating that it was illegal for CAAs to practice in the state. In June 2000, the SC State Medical Board decided that the AAs were practicing outside of state statutes and immediately issued a cease and desist order to the practicing CAAs. This was done despite the fact that in 1999 the SC Medical Board's legal advisor verbally stated that hiring an AA would not be in violation of any state statutes or medical board policies.

Following this incident, the South Carolina Society of Anesthesiologists (SCSA) began drafting an AA Practice Act that would allow AAs to practice in the state of South Carolina via licensing with the approval and oversight of the state medical board. On January 17, 2001, Senate Bill 343 sponsored by Senator Wes Hayes (R), was introduced into SC state legislature to allow AAs to practice by licensure by the SC State Medical Board. Although vehemently opposed by SCANA, Senate Bill 343 passed with only two amendments to the bill: the removal of language specific to AA student training and the reduction of the allowed supervision ratio of anesthesiologists to AAs from 1:4 to 1:2. The passing of this bill was due to the unwavering support and testimony from CAAs Ellen Allinger and colleagues and the SCSA leadership, specifically Dr. Terry Dodge MD, Dr. Gus Allinger MD, then president-elect Dr. Hector Villa, Jr. MD, and SCSA Executive Director Dr. Margarita Pate, PhD. On May 29, 2001, former Governor Jim Hodges signed Senate Bill 343 into law, officially known as the "South Carolina Anesthesiologist's Assistants Practice Act".

The first CAA to be licensed in the State was Ellen Allinger, CAA who was re-hired by the Rock Hill, SC anesthesia practice group that originally employed her. Other AAs were soon hired and worked in Anderson, Clemson, and Greenville. CAAs currently practice in Rock Hill (6), Myrtle Beach (9), Hilton Head (4), and Charleston (1). The SC-AAA was created in 2014 to advocate for the profession of CAAs throughout the state and provide an organized front to support legislative efforts, such as increasing the supervisory ratio. Despite three attempts to revise the supervision ratio of anesthesiologists to AAs from 1:2 to 1:4, these efforts have fallen short due to the opposition of the SCANA and their many supporters. Currently, the lowered supervision ratio still exists and continues to hamper the widespread employment of CAAs throughout the state.