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March 5, 2024

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr. Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary  
State House  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: H 7577 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety -- Health Care Provider Shield Bill**

Dear Chair Craven:

Please accept this letter of support with amendments for H 7577, legislation that would enact the Health Care Provider Shield Bill, precluding any individual from interfering with a patient's access to transgender healthcare services and reproductive healthcare services, regardless of the patient's location or if the healthcare provider is licensed in the state in which the patient is located at the time the service is provided.

If enacted, H 7577 will improve patient access to reproductive and transgender healthcare by legally protecting these services under state law and should increase the likelihood that reproductive and transgender healthcare providers will want to be licensed to provide such services in Rhode Island. This legislation has been adopted in 11 other states, including Massachusetts, Vermont, and Connecticut.

[A recent study published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) indicates that between 57% and 77% of women at risk for unintended pregnancy in the US use some form of contraception. [Lack of access to reproductive healthcare has been demonstrated to have profound impacts](#) on the health, education, financial and housing stability, and indeed, the reproductive capacity of women (in the case of untreated sexually transmitted infections resulting in infertility). Women of reproductive age living in states where targeted regulation of abortion provider (TRAP) laws are enforced have been found to have a nearly 6% increased rate of suicide relative to pre-enforcement-era data.

Transgender people are a gender minority group in our state and throughout the world. They face a disproportionate amount of violence, abuse, bullying, hate speech, and microaggressions perpetrated by people who do not value transgender autonomy and rights. [The American Psychological Association has reported](#) an increased risk of suicide and other mental health struggles among this population that is directly related to anti-transgender policies and legislation. [A 2023 national survey from the Trevor Project](#) found that nearly one in three LGBTQ+ youth suffered from poor mental health due to anti-LGBTQ policies and legislation. On the other hand, hearing about laws that protect them had a positive effect on their mental health. Similarly, a [2022 study on internet searches from the National Library of Medicine](#) found that anti-transgender legislation had a strong association with suicide-related internet searches in states with a high LGBTQ+ population and that the defeat of these types of bills was associated with fewer depression-related searches. Suicide is a significant risk (and known healthcare disparity) in transgender persons, notably adolescents.

RIDOH's proposed amendment on page 11, lines 29 and 30 is as follows:

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5-37-9.2. Physician profiles — Public access to data. (c) A physician profile shall not include the personal residence address, telephone number, email address, or other personal contact information of the physician, except with the physician's express permission.

This bill is consistent with and aligned with the [Governor's executive order](#) on the protection of reproductive rights for Rhode Islanders and those providing and obtaining reproductive healthcare services in Rhode Island. We applaud the sponsors of the proposed legislation for introducing H 7577 and encourage the Committee's favorable consideration of it. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Utpala Bandy, MD, MPH  
Interim Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary  
The Honorable John G. Edwards  
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel  
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy

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