



ADVANCING INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE

May 15, 2024

Rep. Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support of H-7902 and H-7903 to address state's primary care workforce crisis

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee:

As executive director of the Care Transformation Collaborative of RI (CTC-RI) – the state's health system transformation organization focused on primary care – I write in strong support of two bills being heard before you today, H-7902 and H-7903, both aimed at helping address our state's dire primary care workforce crisis.

Our workforce crisis is projected to soon leave 200,000 Rhode Islanders without access to primary care. Through CTC-RI's many primary care pilot programs that directly support care teams and patients, we've worked with 90% of the state's primary care sites. We also launched a diverse Primary Care Workforce Taskforce to address this crisis, reflected in our final [Strategic Roadmap for Building Primary Care Capacity and Access](#). It's become overwhelmingly clear practices statewide are in desperate need of workforce support, and targeted legislation to help.

Primary care payment rates are among the lowest of all medical specialties and not competitive with neighboring states, like Massachusetts and Connecticut. **Of the 106 Brown University Medical School graduates in 2023, only 14 chose to remain in Rhode Island and practice in primary care. Our small incoming pipeline of workers is not capable of replacing the growing gaps we're seeing post-pandemic, from closed practices to early retirements.**

As a resident of Charlestown and as the executive director of a primary care collaborative, I've seen our challenging workforce conditions firsthand. I hear regularly from primary care providers how challenging it is to continue to practice in RI. My own primary care provider joined a for-profit model for Medicare patients, leaving me without a primary care doctor. After months of searching, I got lucky and found a new doctor. However, I was recently notified that my new doctor is becoming a concierge practice: he will have fewer patients and patients will pay \$500 per quarter (\$2,000 a year out of pocket) just to have access to his services. While I can afford to do this, not all patients may be able to pay a premium for access. I don't blame doctors for doing this because the current system is broken.

Our health care system is the bedrock of our state – keeping families safe, supported, and healthy – and it's in jeopardy. Fortunately, H-7902 and H-7903, being heard today, take critical steps to address this workforce crisis.

I believe these pieces of legislation are so important because they provide scholarships for primary care providers including MDs, NPs, and PAs (H-7903) and increase our clinical training capacity for primary care (H-7902). Packaged with some additional current House legislation that addresses staffing shortages and burnout in primary care by creating pathways for current health care workers to move into licensed positions (H-8078), and loan repayment for our healthcare workforce (H-8079), with your support, our state can take very important steps toward addressing the needs of primary care, and more importantly, thousands of Rhode Islanders.

I urge you to stand up for the future of primary care in Rhode Island, and many families in every community who desperately need access to care. This crisis will not be resolved without targeted legislation and investments in our dedicated workforce. Please support H-7902 and H-7903 today. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Debra Hurwitz, MBA, BSN, RN Executive Director, CTC-RI