



To: House Finance Committee
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition (email: ProtectRIHealth@gmail.com)
Date: May 15, 2024
Re: SUPPORT H-7903 and H-7902 -- Primary Care Scholarship Program and Primary Care Training Sites

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a shared mission to protect, improve, and expand equitable access to quality, person-centered, affordable health care for all.

We are committed to ensuring that every Rhode Islander has access to culturally competent healthcare that meets their needs. We know that access to primary care is vital to our residents' everyday health and prevents the development of more serious health problems. A strong primary care network is also critical to an efficient healthcare delivery system – ensuring people do not need care in more expensive settings, including emergency rooms. The Coalition **strongly supports Representative Fogarty's bills** to strengthen the primary care workforce.

We know that Rhode Island, like many states, is experiencing a shortage of primary care providers, a problem that will only grow with time. Our primary care workforce is aging, and many providers are experiencing burnout. Happily, we have a road map to address this crisis, as set forth in the report issued by the Office of Health Insurance Commissioner in December 2023.¹ One of the recommended strategies focuses on primary care workforce training, the issue that H-7903 and H-7902 address.

Establishing a four-year scholarship program for primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants (H-7903) addresses the sad reality of disparity in earnings for primary care providers compared to specialists. Providing scholarships in return for a commitment to practice in Rhode Island will allow medical students to pursue practicing in primary care by reducing or removing their student debt. The scholarship program also opens the door for a more diverse group of students to enter primary care professions. New funding for clinical training sites (H-7902) with primary care training criteria and curriculum will ensure that students committed to primary care can receive the training they need by ensuring that sites have the capacity and resources to support them.

These two bills, in concert with two bills sponsored by Representative Tanzi (H-8078, The Ladders to Licensure program, and H-8079, the Health Professional Loan Repayment bill), which focus on enhancing other sectors of the healthcare workforce, provide an integrated set of actions and investments that are critical to enact now to address current shortages in access to care and to avoid deeper problems down the road.

We urge the committee's support for Representative Fogarty's bills.

Thank you

Protect Our Healthcare Coalition allies & partners: Economic Progress Institute, Mental Health Association RI, RI NOW, RIPIN, The Womxn Project, RI Health Center Association, United Way of Rhode Island, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, Foster Forward, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, Oasis Wellness & Recovery Center, RI Community Food Bank, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), Thundermist Health Center, National Association of Social Workers RI Chapter, Advocates for Better Care

¹ <https://ohic.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur736/files/2023-12/Primary%20Care%20in%20Rhode%20Island%20-%20Current%20Status%20and%20Policy%20Recommendations%20December%202023.pdf>