

House Finance Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

May 15, 2024

Re: Testimony in Support of House bill 7902, titled An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- Primary Care Training Sites Program AND House bill 7903, titled An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- The Medical Primary Care Scholarship Program

Dear Chairperson Abney and members of the House Finance Committee:

I am Thomas Meehan, PhD, PA-C from Barrington and House District 66. I am also the Program Director for the Physician Assistant Program at Johnson & Wales University which became the first University in Rhode Island to offer a PA program 10 years ago.

I support House bills 7902, titled An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- Primary Care Training Sites Program and 7903, titled An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- The Medical Primary Care Scholarship Program.

I support bills 7902 and 7903 because...

- Primary care practice in Rhode Island is at a critical junction with a current and emergent deficit in primary care practitioners at the MD, PA, and NP level. Even if you can find a provider that is taking new patients, the wait times for appointments are many months. The best medicine is preventative to avoid developing disease and not reactive. This is the focus of primary care.
- The Johnson & Wales PA program currently graduates 35 students per year. Of these graduates, about 10 practice in Rhode Island and only 4 practice in primary care in Rhode Island.
- The biggest limiting factor for increasing the class size is the deficiency in quality clinical training sites including primary care. PA students have required clinical rotations in Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Pediatrics amongst other specialties.
- Bill 7902 establishes a primary care training site program. Training sites typically lose revenue when they take on a student as the preceptor sees less patients per day. This bill will allow primary care sites to receive grants to offset this loss of revenue thus encouraging more participation in precepting students. Additionally, this bill will standardize the training at each of these sites to promote a consistent learning experience for the student and an improved likelihood of the student staying in primary care. If more clinical training sites are available, programs will be able to train more students, thus increasing the number of practitioners staying in primary care upon graduation.
- For bill 7903, the average Physician Assistant graduate comes out of school with about \$118K in combined undergraduate and graduate student loans. The starting salary in primary care practice for a PA is 17% lower than specialty practice. For this reason, some students choose to practice in specialty practice over primary care. Nationally, only 23% of PAs practice in primary care and this number has steadily declined over the last decade. In Rhode Island, this number is only 18% out of 603 certified PAs.

- Bill 7903 would support 5 scholarships for PA students who are willing to practice in primary care in Rhode Island upon graduation. For each year of school (2 years for the JWU PA program), students would receive \$47,000 which would significantly improve the financial burden upon graduation. For these two years of scholarship, PA graduates would practice in Rhode Island in primary care for 4 years (2 per year of scholarship).
- Finally, I want to note that once PAs choose a specialty, they typically stay in that specialty throughout their career. 69% of PAs have changed fewer than 2 times.

I urge you to vote in favor of bills 7902 and 7903.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of bill 7902 and 7903.

Sincerely,

Thomas Meehan, PhD, PA-C

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House District 66