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The Honorable Susan Donovan, Chair
Honorable Members of the House Committee on
Health and Welfare
Room 135
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H7234 - OPPOSE

Chairwoman Donovan and Members of the Committee,

I am here today to express my strong opposition to House Bill 7234. As a recent graduate of the Emergency Medicine residency program at Brown University, an assistant professor of emergency medicine, and a physician who cares deeply for the well-being of my patients I can attest that the animal models we use provide an unparalleled level of procedural training. This ultimately benefits the people of Rhode Island by helping us create the best-prepared emergency medicine physicians possible.

This bill aims to eliminate the use of live animals in medical training. Brown Emergency Medicine has provided an annual course to train residents in low frequency, high-stakes procedures for years. My recent completion of 4 years of residency training at with Brown Emergency Medicine has put me in a unique position to convey my experience as it relates to this issue. I went through this course myself as a resident, and I am certain it has helped me save several of my patient's lives. I have trained extensively on simulated plastic models. These models are necessary but they cannot simulate the complex, realistic, and unexpected challenges that a live animal model provides.

I can attest to the rigorous standards and training upheld by our institution in compliance with standards set forth by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), the organization that provides oversight for animal based medical research. This program requires yearly review of our protocols, facilities, and planned research to ensure that we are meeting those standards. All instructors are required to undergo extensive training by completing multiple courses in animal research and meeting the veterinarians who run the lab. We do not take the use of animal models, nor our responsibility to train capable physicians, lightly. We commit our efforts to upholding the highest standards of ethical, humane research while providing the best education possible.

In my personal experience, I have been faced with the need to perform a cricothyrotomy, or surgical airway, only once. I was in my last year of residency and had completed our animal training course. This young patient present with severe swelling in their neck due to an infection that rapidly progressed, to the point that I could visibly see their airway starting to close. Despite having other experienced emergency physicians and multiple anesthesiologists present, no one was able to intubate this patient. Their blood oxygen saturation dropped to immediately life-threatening levels and they were at imminent risk of dying.

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I called upon my experience in the animal lab and perform a cricothyrotomy, immediately providing the patient with oxygen. None of my experiences with non-live training models provided me with the confidence, technical prowess, and efficiency that I learned in this course. That patient survived and was discharged from the hospital several days later. Had I not been able to perform that procedure, their heart would have stopped within seconds. They would have died or suffered from permanent brain damage.

My experience is only one of countless stories from our residents and graduates. These residents graduate and go on to work in emergency departments all over the country and world, and many will stay to care for the people of Rhode Island. We serve the people of this state best by providing the highest level of training available and creating the most capable physicians. I urge this committee to consider this testimony, and the impact that passing this bill will have on our ability as physicians to care for our patients.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak here today.

Sincerely,

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