

February 29, 2024

Dear Chair Donovan and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support of House Bill 7455, both as a pharmacist practicing in Rhode Island for over 25 years, and as a former smoker.

I started smoking cigarettes as a teenager on and off, but by the time I got to college I had become addicted. I tried to quit many times, but due to embarrassment and stigma, I never told my primary care physician that I smoked.

Without a prescription I couldn't get coverage for medication to help me quit. The cost of over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy was more than I could spend as a young person making minimum wage working a part-time job while in college. Due to this unnecessary insurance barrier, I had to try quitting cold turkey, but cravings led me to relapse several times over a number of years.

There is no medical reason that someone should need a prescription from a physician to get over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy or other FDA approved medications for tobacco cessation covered by their health insurance. From a public health perspective, helping people quit smoking is of paramount importance and this bill is crucial to remove unnecessary barriers to safe and effective tobacco cessation therapy.

This bill is particularly urgent to move forward now, when Rhode Island is faced with a primary care physician shortage. People trying to make an appointment to see a provider are met with long wait times, sometimes several months. Quitting smoking is something people often attempt at holidays or around special dates, and being able to quickly respond to a desire to start a quit attempt is something pharmacists can do more than any other healthcare provider, as we can be seen without an appointment.

Please consider passing H7455 to ensure increased access to affordable nicotine replacement therapy and FDA approved smoking cessation therapies via health insurance, by allowing pharmacists to furnish these products to people struggling with nicotine dependence and addiction.

Best regards,



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