

Testimony in Support of Proposed House Bill No. 5168

I hope this testimony finds you well. Our names are Zachary Johns, Jane Kaull, Mollie Ockene, and Alexander Pralea, and we are all medical students at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and student leaders of the Environmental Coalition Group. We are writing to express the utmost support for the proposed House Bill 5168, which aims to mandate that all healthcare facilities in Rhode Island begin their transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. This is a critical step in ensuring that the next generation of Rhode Islanders can enjoy the beauty of an even healthier, more prosperous Ocean State.

While in medicine our calling is to save lives, the health-care sector may put human health at risk through its contribution to climate change. The health-care sector is estimated to cause an estimated 4.4% of total greenhouse gas emissions globally, according to *the Lancet*, a leading medical journal.¹ Fossil fuels also contribute to the airborne production of particulate matter and air pollutants (such as nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide), which cause cumulative damage to the heart, lungs, and every vital organ in the body.² In childhood, this could translate to debilitating asthma that lands a child in a cycle of traumatizing hospitalizations. In adulthood, this could contribute to premature death from cardiovascular and respiratory disease.

In medical school, we are already learning about the growing burden of insect-borne diseases and heat stroke in Rhode Island, morbidities that are among the many health consequences of climate change that have already begun to influence patient care. All in all, HB 5168 represents a unique opportunity for Rhode Island to position itself at the forefront of healthcare sustainability, thereby serving as a model to the rest of the nation. We humbly urge that the members of the House Health and Human Services Committee vote to pass HB 5168 to keep Rhode Island healthy for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Zachary Johns, Jane Kaull, Mollie Ockene, Alexander Pralea

First-year Medical Students at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University

Citations:

1. Lenzen M, Malik A, Li M, et al. The environmental footprint of health care: a global assessment. *Lancet Planet Health*. 2020;4(7):e271-e279. doi:10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30121-2
2. Watts N, Amann M, Arnell N, et al. The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate. *The Lancet*. 2019;394(10211):1836-1878. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32596-6