



March 5, 2024

Chair Robert E. Craven, Sr.
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support for H-7577 – Health Care Provider Shield Bill

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Rhode Island Chapter of the National Organization for Women (RI NOW) supports H-7577 to protect access to both reproductive and gender affirming care for both providers and patients. RI NOW supports the right for all people to seek reproductive care, to include abortions, and LGBTQIA+ rights, to include the rights of transgender and gender non-confirming individuals to seek appropriate health care needs. And our support extends to the health care providers who provide these vital services with top quality care.

Since the United States Supreme Court overturned the longstanding precedent of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, which then allowed for states to ban abortion procedures, 21 states throughout the country have fully banned or effectively banned abortion procedures. Some of these states have not only criminalized women and doctors for abortion services, failed pregnancies, and life threatening medical conditions, but some have threatened to charge and prosecute individuals from seeking or providing care in other states where it remains legal.

Similarly, transgender people have been targeted by extremist groups aimed at controlling individual freedom in expressions of gender. There are over 500 bills filed just this year throughout the country in over 40 states aimed at restricting the rights of transgender people, with at least a quarter of those bills seeking to prohibit and/or limit health care to both minors and adults.

Rhode Island has affirmed and reaffirmed the right for all people in our state to seek abortions and reproductive care. And we have affirmed again and again that transgender people are welcome in our state and free to seek the care they need to express their identity. These concerning threats from Americans in other states who may not respect our rights as an individual state should alarm us all. And if they don't alarm you specifically, consider how they might otherwise intimidate our health care providers and cause reservations about offering life saving care out of fear of retribution and attacks from outside actors.

We owe it to our health care workers to assure them that they can do their job without fear of outside interference and that we will protect them from prosecution and litigation for doing the job that is affirmed as legal, acceptable, and valid in the state they practice in. Additionally, our residents and visitors who may end up seeking reproductive care and/or gender affirming care deserve to be assured that they can request these services and discuss them with their doctor freely without their records being released to outside agencies, violating their privacy.

This bill is not about debating reproductive rights or LGBTQIA+ rights. We've had those discussions repeatedly and have affirmed that Rhode Islanders have access to those rights. This bill is about standing up to bigotry and extremism against bodily autonomy, denying unjustified litigation, and signaling to our health care providers that we stand with them and support them in continuing to provide high quality care to their patients. Let's join our friends in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and other states that support the rights of their people, and pass this bill for Rhode Island. RI NOW thanks the sponsors and supporters of this bill. We wholeheartedly offer our support and we urge you to pass H-7577 out of committee and bring it to the floor for a vote.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



Giona Picheco
Legislative Chair
RI NOW

Rhode Island National Organization for Women (RI NOW) is a membership-based advocacy organization with hundreds of members and supporters throughout the state of Rhode Island. Our mission is to take action to bring women into full participation in all aspects of public and private life without experiencing barriers based on gender. Our key issue areas include economic equity, ending violence against women, reproductive health and justice, 2SLGBTQIA+ civil rights, and ending racism.