



April 13, 2021

The Honorable Robert E. Craven
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H6171

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Chapter of the National Organization for Women, we submit this written testimony in support of H6171, which prohibits surgeries on children 12 and under born with variations in their physical sex characteristics (unless required to address an immediate risk of physical harm).

This bill applies to the approximately 1-2% of people born with variations in bodily sex characteristics—such as genitalia, reproductive organs, and chromosomes— sometimes referred to as intersex traits. We should understand H6171 as a human rights measure that will help ensure that life-altering choices about their bodies and, in some cases, gender identities are not forced upon them soon after they are born.

Unnecessary surgeries on infants with variations in their physical sex characteristics are often based on generalized assumptions about how the child will prefer their body to appear and function when they grow up. These assumptions are rooted in gender stereotypes, and the medical literature even promotes these surgeries out of a desire to avoid homosexuality and prevent the development of certain gender identities in individuals born with variations in their sex characteristics. The bill only applies to surgeries that are not essential to perform in childhood and that carry serious risks of harm. Note that H6171 makes specific exceptions for the cases in which one of the otherwise-prohibited surgeries would be urgently needed before the age of 12 for the child's physical health (mental health professionals advise that 12 is the youngest age at which individuals are typically more likely to have the cognitive development necessary to better understand the ramifications of surgery and to participate in this decision-making process).

Thank you for considering this important bill that essentially offers time to Rhode Islanders born with variations in their physical sex characteristics to participate in personal and life-altering decisions about their bodies.

Sincerely,

Hilary Levey Friedman, PhD
President RI Chapter, National Organization for Women

***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. We believe that anyone who identifies as a woman deserves equality and equity in political, social, and economic arenas.*