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House Corporations Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

April 14, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 8137 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government — Rhode Island Protect Our Healthcare Act of 2026

Dear Chairperson and Members of the House Corporations Committee:

I am Jessica Eagles, a resident of Rhode Island and Chief Executive Officer of the Rhode Island Free Clinic.

I support House Bill No. 8137, titled *An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government — Rhode Island Protect Our Healthcare Act of 2026*.

I support this bill because access to healthcare remains one of the most pressing challenges facing uninsured individuals across our state. Every day at the Rhode Island Free Clinic, we see firsthand the consequences of gaps in coverage—patients delaying care, managing chronic conditions without consistent treatment, and turning to emergency departments for issues that could have been prevented with timely primary care.

- **Real patient impact:** We serve over 1,700 uninsured adults annually, many of whom are working individuals who fall through the cracks of existing coverage options. Without access to consistent care, their health conditions often worsen, becoming more complex and costly to treat.

- **Cost-effective solution:** The Rhode Island Free Clinic delivers more than \$5.5 million in care annually on an operating budget of approximately \$2.2 million, demonstrating the efficiency and impact of investing in preventive and primary care. Expanding access through a publicly funded program would reduce avoidable emergency department visits and hospitalizations, ultimately lowering overall healthcare costs.

- **Strengthening the healthcare system:** This bill represents an opportunity to stabilize and strengthen Rhode Island’s healthcare safety net. By creating a structured program for uninsured individuals, we can ensure more equitable access to care while relieving pressure on already overburdened emergency systems.

- **Workforce and training impact:** Programs like ours also serve as critical training grounds for the next generation of healthcare professionals. Expanding access to care supports not only patients, but also the development of a diverse and mission-driven healthcare workforce.



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- A timely and necessary investment: With ongoing uncertainty around federal healthcare policies and rising costs of living, more Rhode Islanders are at risk of becoming uninsured. Proactively addressing this need is both fiscally responsible and morally imperative.

I urge you to vote in favor of House Bill No. 8137.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jessica Eagles

Jessica Eagles
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