



March 3, 2026

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair  
House Committee on Education  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H 7418 – UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND  
SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY**

Chair McNamara and Members of the House Committee on Education:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we strongly support **H 7418**, which would establish medical and dental schools at the University of Rhode Island to strengthen our in-state pipeline for training the healthcare professionals Rhode Islanders need.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. Under our **Strong Families** pillar, we advance policies that strengthen household stability and reduce barriers to opportunity. Access to timely primary care and dental care is foundational to family stability, and Rhode Island's current workforce shortages have become a direct barrier to that access.

Rhode Island faces persistent primary care access gaps, particularly in areas already designated as underserved. As of **December 31, 2025**, Rhode Island had **17 federally designated Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)** affecting **257,218 residents**; in those designated areas, only **74.29% of need is met**, and **22 additional primary care practitioners** are needed to remove the shortage designations. At the same time, the state's training-to-workforce pipeline is not retaining enough graduates to meet demand: in academic year **2022–2023**, only **15 of 106 (14%)** primary care residency graduates in Rhode Island planned to provide primary care in Rhode Island, and only **48 of 144 (33%)** NP and PA graduates in primary care programs planned to provide primary care in the state. These indicators underscore the need to expand in-state education capacity and strengthen workforce pathways that improve recruitment, training, and long-term retention.

Dental access shows an even sharper shortage signal. As of **December 31, 2025**, Rhode Island had **15 federally designated Dental HPSAs** affecting **208,900 residents**; only **38.00% of need is met** in those areas, and **33 additional dentists** are needed to remove the shortage designations. More broadly, Rhode Island has **51.7 dentists per 100,000 residents (2021)**—the lowest ratio in New England—and the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training projects the state will need **226 additional dentists by 2032** to replace workforce exits and meet population needs.



United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for **H 7418**. Establishing in-state medical and dental schools, paired with clear workforce development and retention pathways—will strengthen Rhode Island’s healthcare workforce, improve access to primary and dental care, and advance family stability statewide.

Sincerely,  
Elijah McLean  
Manager, Government Relations & Policy  
United Way of Rhode Island