

May 15, 2024

Dear Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I am writing in support of House Bill Number 7398.

My name is Eric Kerns. I have worked as a kidney doctor at Rhode Island Hospital for ten years. During this time, I have taken care of over 20 undocumented patients with end-stage kidney disease, all of them receiving dialysis at one of our two dialysis clinics. The overwhelming majority of these patients are younger and healthier than the average dialysis patient. Many of them have lived in the United States for more than a decade, work full or part-time jobs, and are active members of the community. Few of them came to the United States with pre-existing medical conditions or in search of medical care.

These patients can receive dialysis through a charitable fund at Rhode Island Hospital for which they apply annually. However, they are denied access to kidney transplantation at Rhode Island Hospital because they have no insurance. Other states, among them Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, California, and Illinois, provide statewide dialysis coverage through Medicaid, and several of these (Massachusetts, California, and Illinois to name a few) provide statewide transplantation through Medicaid.

Kidney transplantation as compared to dialysis, for most patients with end-stage kidney disease, improves quality and quantity of life dramatically. The five-year survival on dialysis, for example, is around 50%, whereas the five-year survival after kidney transplant is close to 90%. Additionally, the annual costs of medical care after kidney transplantation are significantly lower than chronic dialysis, whereas Medicare pays over \$70,000 per year for in-center dialysis, post-transplant care costs about \$30,000 per year after the initial cost of surgery and hospitalization.

H7398 would afford undocumented Rhode Islanders with end-stage kidney disease the opportunity to undergo kidney transplantation at Rhode Island Hospital. These patients would then become more active, productive members of the community. Perhaps most importantly, the healthcare system in Rhode Island would save money. This is the right decision on ethical and economic grounds. I encourage members of the House to vote in favor of H7398.

I am happy to answer questions.

Sincerely,

Eric Kerns, MD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Brown Medicine, Brown Physicians, Inc
Providence, Rhode Island

Additional Resources

- Linden EA et al. "Kidney Transplantation in Undocumented Immigrants with ESRD: A Policy Whose Time Has Come?" American Journal of Kidney Disease, Vol 60, No 3, 2012
- Rizzolo, K et al. "Access to Kidney Care for Undocumented Immigrants Across the United States." Annals of Internal Medicine, Vol 176, No 6, June 2023
- Cervantes CE. "Transplant inequity." Nature, Vol 615, March 2023