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To: House Finance Committee
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition (ProtectRIHealth@gmail.com)
Date: April 30, 2025
Subj: **SUPPORT H5984** – To Establish the Primary Care Scholarship Program

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a shared mission to protect, improve, and expand equitable access to quality, person-centered, affordable health care for all. The Coalition strongly **supports H5984**, to strengthen Rhode Island's primary care workforce by establishing the Primary Care Scholarship Program.

We are deeply concerned about the current crises of the shortage of primary care providers in Rhode Island. As we've experienced most recently with the closing of Anchor Medical, this is a rapidly escalating crisis that can only be resolved through a multi-pronged strategy. The Primary Care Scholarship Program represents one critically needed 'prong'. Our primary care workforce is aging, and many providers are experiencing burnout. This problem cannot be put off -- it requires immediate attention.

The establishment of a four-year scholarship program for primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants addresses the disparity in earnings for primary care providers compared to specialists. This program, which offers scholarships in return for a commitment to practice in Rhode Island, will not only alleviate the burden of student debt for medical students but also encourage them to pursue a career in primary care, a significant step towards strengthening and diversifying our primary care workforce.

As a Coalition, we are committed to ensuring that every Rhode Islander has access to culturally competent care that meets their healthcare needs. We know that access to primary care is vital to our residents' everyday health and prevents the development of more serious health problems. A strong primary care network is critical to an efficient healthcare delivery system – ensuring people do not need care in more expensive settings, including emergency rooms.

Primary care is the bedrock of a healthy healthcare delivery system and the health of our state's residents. We urge the committee's support.

Thank you.

Protect Our Healthcare Coalition partners include: Economic Progress Institute, RIPIN, Mental Health Association RI, RI Health Center Association, Latino Policy Institute, Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone (CPO-HEZ), United Way of Rhode Island, Senior Agenda Coalition RI, RI Medical Society, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, RI Community Food Bank, RI Psychological Association, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), National Association of Social Workers RI Chapter, The Womxn Project, Advocates for Better Care
