



May 20th, 2025

RE: H 5526 – Thundermist Family Residency Program – support

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Dr. Christopher Klaus, and I serve as the president of the Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians. I write today in strong support of the Thundermist Family Medicine Residency Program and the broader Teaching Health Center model through bill H5526.

The Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians exists to promote the health of the patients, families and communities of Rhode Island by advancing the specialty of Family Medicine through education and advocacy. We have 190 plus active members who staff private practices and community health centers, deliver babies, make home visits, and treat patients at every hospital in Rhode Island. Our doctors work with schools, day care centers, nursing homes, and care for entire families from every community in the state.

The proposed Thundermist Family Medicine Residency is uniquely positioned to advance Rhode Island's healthcare future. As we are all aware, the state is in dire need of primary care providers. Any program that promotes Family Medicine is a commitment to primary care in the state as Family Medicine physicians deliver nearly half of physician-delivered primary care in Rhode Island (45%) as compared to Internal Medicine (31%) and Pediatrics (24%) and ninety percent of physicians specializing in Family Medicine enter primary care. If you are interested in increasing primary care in Rhode Island, increasing Family Medicine residency opportunities in the state is the surest investment.

Furthermore, residencies rooted in community health centers such as Thundermist directly address the need for primary care in Woonsocket and Northern Rhode Island communities. Teaching Health Center residencies build a workforce of resilient, committed physicians dedicated to underserved populations. The Executive Board of the Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians is not only composed of all Brown educated Family Medicine providers but also physicians that all work in non-profit medicine dedicated to our most vulnerable populations.

On a personal note, I graduated from the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine in 2011. I matched at Brown/Memorial Hospital with no ties to Rhode Island other than a desire to complete my medical education at an amazing program. After completing my three years of Family Medicine residency in 2014 I took a job at Thundermist Health Center of South County

and have been there ever since. Like most graduates from a residency program, I chose to stay and work in the state where I completed my residency. With no prior ties to Rhode Island, I have come to call this state my home and raise a family here in Providence. There is no secret to increasing primary care in the state: provide high-quality, sought-after Family Medicine residency opportunities and physicians will come and start their careers in Rhode Island.

I urge you to fully support the Thundermist Family Medicine Residency Program and make an investment in the Teaching Health Center model which will expand primary care opportunities in the state. Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to improving healthcare for all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,
Christopher Klaus, MD
President of the Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians