



May 20, 2025

Dear Chair Abney and Members, Senate Finance Committee

RE: Support for H5984

The Senior Agenda Coalition of RI (SACRI) is pleased to support H5984, AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE MEDICAL PRIMARY CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM introduced by Representatives Fogarty, Carson, Cortvriend, Shallcross Smith, Knight, Casimiro, Stewart, Donovan, Alzate and Cruz.

SACRI'S mission is to mobilize people to implement an agenda that improves the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders and adults with disabilities. In thinking about improving *quality of life* promoting timely access to needed healthcare ranks as one of SACRI's top priorities.

We commend Representative Fogarty and the bill's co-sponsors for introducing this legislation as one of several bills addressing the crisis impacting our state's primary care providers. As noted in *Primary Care in Rhode Island*, a December 2023 Office of Health Insurance Commissioner (OHIC) report, "A robust and resilient system of primary care is necessary to support the health and well-being of Rhode Islanders." Primary care is critically important for older adults who tend to have greater healthcare needs as a result of chronic conditions needing ongoing monitoring and treatment maintenance to promote optimal health. Access to primary care is equally important for addressing emergent needs as delays in diagnosis and treatment can exacerbate conditions leading to costly emergency room visits as well as inpatient hospitalizations.

Recent events such as closing of a large primary care practice, layoffs at community healthcare centers and reported retirements of providers have amplified the need to address the state's shortage of primary care providers. Creation of and investing in a Medical Primary Care scholarship program as called for in this bill is one way of boosting our primary care workforce. The bill details strong eligibility standards and conditions with reasonable maximum awards for medical school recipients, nurse practitioner and physician assistant students with requirements for contracts and a promissory note to work in the state prior to receipt of funds. Initial funding for the scholarship program would come from the Wavemaker program (\$500,000) and \$500,000 from general funds being appropriated by the general assembly in future years.

I urge you to consider recommending passage of H5984 and thank you for your consideration.

Carol Anne Costa, Executive Director
SACRI