

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Rhode Island Chapter

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Support of H5984, the Medical Primary Care Scholarship Program

Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

On the behalf of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, I would like to offer our support for H5984.

As a practicing pediatrician in Rhode Island for nearly 30 years, I have seen our workforce change considerably. A survey conducted by the RIAAP showed that 50% of practicing primary care pediatricians in Rhode Island trained at our local Hasbro residency program. Investments in primary care, such as the institution of Rite care in the 90's, supported a flourishing workforce as up to 50% of graduates from our pediatric residency program stayed in our state to work. Over the years, however, investment in primary care has dwindled, and our ability to retain our residents has followed. Over the past 5 years, only 4 of 20 graduating pediatric residents have gone into primary care, and only 2 per year on average have chosen to remain in Rhode Island. In addition, our ability to hire pediatricians trained in other states has diminished, as poor payments for primary care make recruiting more difficult. Our 2024 survey also showed that 27% of primary care pediatricians, as many as 70, plan to retire in the next 5 years.

The net result is that we are losing more pediatricians from the workforce than we are producing - our pipeline is insufficient to replace the number of providers we need to maintain patient access to primary care. The CTC-RI Task Force report on primary care work force capacity recommends a multifaceted approach to address this problem. One recommendation is to establish a state funded scholarship program for individuals who will make and early commitment to practice primary care in Rhode Island upon graduation. Substantial new investment in a meaningful RI Primary Care scholarship program— offering more effective support than the Wavemakers tax credit program— will help us rebuild and expand our primary care workforce.

Bill H5984, sponsored by Representative Fogarty, would establish a State Scholarship program that would be administered by the director of the department of health in consultation with the commissioner of post-secondary education. This program shall be aligned with the RIDOH office of primary care and rural health and leverage existing infrastructure with the loan repayment program. This will give students a one-stop-shop for scholarships and loan repayment.

I strongly encourage you to support this bill.

Gregory Fox, MD, FAAP