



Honorable Chair Abney
House Finance Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for H5984

May 20, 2025

Dear Chairman Abney,

I write to you on behalf of the Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians (RIAFP) in **strong support of H5984** which supports the creation of a primary care scholarship program.

According to the American Medical Association (AMA), the **average amount of student loan debt for those graduating from medical school in 2023 was \$202,000**. Meanwhile primary care specialties are among the lowest paid in medicine. When graduates are saddled with large amounts of debt, it becomes hard to justify going into a primary care specialty when you could be making much more money by choosing an alternate specialty. In order to maintain a robust pipeline of primary care providers in the state, it is important to put in place financial incentives like the proposed primary care scholarship program.

Furthermore, by stipulating that providers must practice in Rhode Island upon graduation, this bill helps to recruit primary care providers to our state. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Rhode Island Family Medicine physicians, who overwhelmingly enter primary care, **make less on average than in neighboring states like Massachusetts and Connecticut**. This means that financial incentives, like the proposed primary care scholarship program, are necessary for recruitment and retainment of primary care providers to Rhode Island.

The **primary care crisis in our state is reaching truly alarming levels**. With the recent closure of Anchor Medical Associates we see ever more patients scrambling and struggling to find primary care providers, while the waitlists at other practices get longer and longer. By now you have probably either personally experienced a gap in primary care or know others who have. We need to remedy this situation as soon as possible to ensure a healthy community and to reduce costs associated with overuse of emergency and specialist care - **every \$1 spent on primary care is associated with \$13 of downstream savings**.

The primary care shortage is a multifaceted problem that will require varied short and long term solutions to address. While a scholarship program will not fix the primary care shortage today or next year, it will help establish a necessary long term pipeline to ensure stability in primary care for years to come, while we also pursue short term solutions for the current challenges faced in primary care.

I respectfully urge you and the committee to support House Bill 5984 **to ensure long term stability of the primary care workforce and help lift us out of the crisis that we are facing in Rhode Island.**

Sincerely,

Katharina de Klerk, DO
RIAFP President-Elect and Advocacy Committee Chair