



The Miriam Hospital

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Rhode Island House of Representatives
Chairman Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
State House
Providence, Rhode Island

RE: Support for Restoring Funding – Department of Health Tuberculosis (TB) Clinic

Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Karen Tashima, and I am an Infectious Disease physician at Brown University Health in Providence.

I have worked in Rhode Island providing infectious disease care and consultation at The Miriam Hospital in the inpatient and outpatient settings. I am very aware of the services provided by the TB Clinic at The Miriam Hospital.

I am writing to urge the Committee to restore funding for the Rhode Island Department of Health Tuberculosis (TB) Clinic.

The TB clinic provides specialized clinical expertise and coordination that supports physicians, hospitals, and community health programs across the state. Tuberculosis care requires careful monitoring, treatment adherence, and public health follow-up to ensure patients complete therapy and to prevent further transmission.

During my 30-year medical career in Rhode Island, the RISE TB clinic has played an extremely important role in TB control for the state and region. The focus of the TB clinic is on preventing activation of tuberculosis by treating people who have been infected but do not have an active infection. This is called treatment of latent TB infection. Anyone infected with TB who has not been given treatment can experience an activation of TB later in life due to aging or immune suppression, which typically manifests as pneumonia. TB pneumonia patients are contagious to others through their coughing. People can then become infected from spending time around these individuals. Children and elderly are particularly vulnerable and can become sick immediately.

The identification of TB and treatment of both latent and active TB, tracing of potentially infected patients is a very powerful way to control tuberculosis. We have the means to do this in Rhode Island and the US, but unfortunately this is not the case in many parts of the world, and TB is not in control in those countries. John Green recently published a book on the subject called “Everything is Tuberculosis” in which he describes the ongoing health crisis around the world.

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I'm particularly concerned that taking the focus away from TB in this state by defunding the TB clinic, will expose the population in RI to increased numbers of cases of TB infection. The effects can be devastating to individuals particularly when TB is diagnosed late or not thought of in a timely fashion. This can happen even with our current TB control measures and would only become worse and less manageable if we lose current focus on TB control.

When I see a patient in the hospital with pneumonia that could potentially be tuberculosis, I initiate the process to find the patient a special isolation room. These rooms are very expensive and there are only a handful in each hospital in RI. I am concerned that an increase in active TB cases will mean more expensive care as well as increased concern about infecting the medical staff caring for these patients.

Dr. Rybak is the Medical Director of the RISE Tuberculosis (TB) Clinic (The Miriam Hospital). In that role, she provides highly expert and timely care for active TB patients referred from throughout the state. She oversees the RISE TB Clinic. She works closely with infection control at all RI hospitals and RI Department of Health.

Dr. Rybak and her predecessors have done a phenomenal job at managing all cases of active TB and managing latent TB in the state. Dr. Rybak is always available to the medical community to give advice, provide care and to manage the concerns around TB. Her expertise and unwavering focus are invaluable. The RISE TB clinic provides critical function in maintaining the public health.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to restore funding for the TB clinic and ensure Rhode Island maintains the capacity to manage tuberculosis effectively and protect public health.

Sincerely,



Karen T. Tashima, MD
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