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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

March 24, 2026

Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennie Johnson, and I am an Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University and an attending physician. As such, I am often asked to help diagnose and treat those with suspected, latent, or active tuberculosis infections.

Today, March 24th, is World Tuberculosis Day. On this day, I am writing to urge the Committee to restore funding for the Rhode Island Department of Health Tuberculosis (TB) Clinic.

Tuberculosis is a contagious bacterial infection caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It is transmitted from person to person through the air when someone with an active infection coughs, sneezes, or spits. Children and infants exposed to TB are more likely to develop infections than adults. However, TB is both preventable and curable. In fact, treating those with TB protects and prevents those without TB from infection. Despite this, TB is the world's leading cause of death from a single infectious agent. In 2024, TB was among the top ten causes of death among people, killing 1.23 million people. While most TB infections and related deaths are outside of the United States, we know very well, especially from lessons from the COVID 19 pandemic, that infectious diseases do not abide by geopolitical borders.

Access to TB treatment in the state of Rhode Island is of vital importance to both patients with TB and for the health of the public in general. The Rhode Island Department of Health Tuberculosis Clinic is the one place where people with active TB infections can safely receive treatment. ***Just last week there were 5 new cases of active TB diagnosed in Rhode Island.*** 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.

The impact if the TB clinic were to be defunded and subsequently close will be immense on several levels. RIDOH may lose funding from the CDC. This would also put RIDOH Director, Dr. Jerome Larkin, who is mandated by law to ensure that appropriate treatment, monitoring, and care for TB are available for every individual who is isolated and confined, with no restrictions based on the patient's ability to pay (RI General Laws Title 23, Chapter 23-10), in violation of the law. Yet my greatest concern is that we will see local spread of TB, something, again usually seen in predominantly low and middle-income countries. I am concerned for the health of my patients, the health of my community, and the health of my family, including two small children.

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,