

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 Sara Geffert, and I am an Infectious Diseases physician and the Associate Director for the Clinical Microbiology Laboratory at Brown University Health in Providence, RI. I am acutely involved in many of the tuberculosis diagnoses in our state, given the expansive area my laboratory serves. Additionally, I see patients at the hospital bedside who are suffering from the disease, and who rely on targeted clinical follow-up and support.

I am writing to urge the Committee to restore funding for the Rhode Island Department of Health Tuberculosis (TB) Clinic. This clinic serves the entire state and supports our major hospitals, community health centers, and private practices. Tuberculosis care requires careful monitoring, treatment adherence, and public health follow-up to ensure patients complete therapy and to prevent further transmission. A tremendous amount of time and expertise (ranging from support staff, nursing, pharmacists, and specialty clinicians) is required to successfully eradicate TB infection (six months).

The impact of eliminating state funding to the clinic would be detrimental. This would lead to an explosion of new TB cases in the state (and surrounding states), putting yet another unnecessary burden on the already strained health care system. The pre-existing capacity constraints in emergency departments would be amplified, with effects felt hospital and state-wide by practitioners and patients. The responsibility for these patients would shift to practices without the expertise nor infrastructure to manage it. Our health care teams, who stoically waded through the challenges posed by the COVID-19 epidemic, would be asked to endure yet another avoidable hardship. Burn out is already a problem. At some point the system will breakdown, and if not already impacting you or your loved ones – it will. Let us not forget the other battles we are currently confronted with, such as the ongoing measles outbreaks. The time is now to embrace solutions that have already proven to be effective. TB is not an archaic disease, and is not just in textbooks – it is the killer that only appears silent because of the TB Clinic's dedicated work. The monetary and mortality costs of TB will only become louder if we let it.

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, our children, and our families.

Sincerely,

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