



Honorable Chair Abney of the
House Committee on Finance
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H7588

March 30, 2026

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

I write to you on behalf of the Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians (RIAFP) in strong support of House Bill H7588, which would provide funding to establish a new Family Medicine residency program at Thundermist Health Center in Woonsocket.

Rhode Island is facing a serious and persistent shortage of primary care clinicians. Recent data indicate that our state needs more than 250 additional full-time primary care providers to meet current demand. This shortage is driven in part by a longstanding underinvestment in the primary care workforce pipeline. If we are to meaningfully address access challenges and improve health outcomes, we must invest in the training of future primary care physicians here in Rhode Island.

Residency training is the single most important predictor of where a physician ultimately practices. Decades of workforce data consistently demonstrate that physicians are far more likely to establish their careers in the communities where they complete their residency training. If we want more primary care physicians practicing in Rhode Island—particularly in underserved areas—we must therefore expand in-state residency opportunities. Simply put: if we train them here, they are far more likely to stay.

The proposed Family Medicine residency at Thundermist Health Center represents a strategic and high-impact investment in our state's workforce. Thundermist is a federally qualified health center with a long-standing commitment to serving diverse and medically underserved populations. A residency program in Woonsocket would not only increase the number of trained family physicians in the state, but also anchor those trainees in a community where the need is especially great.

Thundermist's West Warwick location is already home to a residency program – it houses a site of the Brown Family Medicine residency training program. The leadership of Thundermist is therefore well-versed in operating a resident program and well-positioned to establish a new program in Woonsocket.

At a time when the national primary care pipeline is under strain, and Family Medicine programs across the country have struggled to fill all of their open positions, Rhode Island's existing family medicine programs have continued to fill all of their positions, demonstrating high demand for training opportunities here.

This investment is also timely given broader conversations about expanding medical education in Rhode Island – including the potential establishment of a new medical school. Increasing the number of medical students without a corresponding increase in residency positions risks losing talented graduates to other states. Strengthening our graduate medical education infrastructure ensures that Rhode Island can retain the physicians it helps train.

H7588 is a smart, targeted investment in Rhode Island's healthcare future. It strengthens the workforce pipeline, supports a trusted community health center, and addresses geographic disparities in access to care. Most importantly, it reflects a commitment to ensuring that all Rhode Islanders—regardless of where they live—have access to high-quality primary care.

On behalf of the RIAFP and the patients we serve, I respectfully urge you to support H7588.

Sincerely,

Katharina de Klerk, DO
RIAFP President and Advocacy Committee Chair