

April 30, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Thundermist Health Center, I write to express our strong support for House Bill 8389 (H 8389), legislation establishing the framework for the creation of a medical school at the University of Rhode Island. As a Rhode Island Federally Qualified Health Center serving more than 65,000 Rhode Islanders, we commend the General Assembly for advancing legislation that strengthens the state's long-term healthcare workforce pipeline and responds to the urgent and growing need for primary care access across the state.

Today, roughly one in four Rhode Islanders lives in a federally designated primary care health professional shortage area, meaning access to a primary care provider is already constrained and worsening. These shortages are felt most acutely in the underserved communities that Thundermist Health Center serves, where access to consistent primary care is essential to improving health outcomes, reducing avoidable hospital utilization, and addressing longstanding health disparities.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that where physicians complete their training is the strongest predictor of where they ultimately practice. National data show that 55–65 percent of physicians practice in the same state where they complete residency training, and research further indicates that when a physician completes both medical school and residency in the same state, there is an approximately 80 percent likelihood that they will ultimately practice in that state. For Rhode Island, this underscores the importance of aligning investments in expanding medical school opportunities with sufficient in-state residency training capacity—particularly in primary care. According to Dr. Michael Fine, former Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health and current member of Primary Care for All Americans, the most recent medical school admissions cycle illustrates the depth of the pipeline challenge. Of 100 Rhode Islanders who applied to medical school, only 16 were accepted at Brown University, 37 were accepted outside of Rhode Island, and 50 did not secure a medical school admission. On average, only one Rhode Islander per year goes to medical school, chooses primary care, completes residency in Rhode Island, and ultimately

chooses to practice in Rhode Island. By contrast, between 55 and 110 primary care providers retire each year, making clear that retirements continue to far outpace new in-state entrants.

At the same time, demand for residency training is strong and sustained. Every primary-care-focused residency training slot in Rhode Island—most notably in Family Medicine and Pediatrics—has been filled for more than a decade, demonstrating both the feasibility of expansion and the opportunity to responsibly grow training capacity to meet primary care workforce needs.

In this context, H 8389 and companion legislation H 7588 operate together as complementary components of a cohesive primary care workforce strategy. H 8389 strengthens the front end of the physician pipeline by expanding access to medical education within the state, while H 7588 ensures Rhode Island has the residency training infrastructure necessary to translate that investment into durable, in-state primary care capacity. Together, these policies support a braided funding approach that leverages Rural Health Transformation Program resources, Medicaid Graduate Medical Education financing, and targeted state investments to expand medical school capacity and community-based residency training, while doing so in a fiscally responsible and sustainable manner.

Thundermist Health Center strongly supports passage of H 8389 and stands ready to partner with the State, the University of Rhode Island, and other stakeholders to ensure that Rhode Island's investments in medical education result in meaningful, long-term improvements in access to primary care for communities across the state.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued commitment to addressing Rhode Island's healthcare workforce challenges.

Respectfully submitted,

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Thundermist Health Center