

Dear Chair Marvin Abney, Vice Chair Scott Slater and Members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing as a practicing pharmacist in Rhode Island to express strong support for the pharmacist-related components of the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP), and to respectfully request critical amendments to ensure its successful implementation. The views expressed in this email are entirely my own and do not represent the views of my employer.

The inclusion of pharmacist scope expansion in the Governor's budget is an important step forward in improving access to care and addressing workforce shortages. However, there are risks of not meeting this intended outcome without updates including broader scope authority and enforceable payment for pharmacist services.

First, the current language limits pharmacists' prescribing to a narrow set of disease states and medications. Under collaborative practice agreements, pharmacists are managing a diverse set of acute and chronic conditions. This provides care to many patients, including those at high risk. Given the current primary care shortage in Rhode Island, these pharmacists play a critical role in providing care for patients beyond the disease states currently included. Expanding the scope will reflect current state clinical capabilities of pharmacist practice as well as allow pharmacists to continue practicing at the top of their license using evidence-based guidelines.

Additionally, authorizing over-the-counter (OTC) prescribing would significantly improve access for vulnerable populations, particularly Medicaid beneficiaries who otherwise may rely on urgent care or emergency departments for minor, treatable conditions.

**Most importantly, the success of RHTP hinges on establishing payment parity. While the proposal indicates that pharmacists “may bill” for services, there is no guarantee of reimbursement from Medicaid or commercial payers.** Without clearly defined payment mechanisms, pharmacists and their employers will face significant financial barriers to implementation, limiting participation and jeopardizing the program's goals.

States that have expanded pharmacist scope without addressing reimbursement have seen limited uptake of services, underscoring the importance of pairing scope expansion with payment reform.

To ensure the RHTP achieves its intended outcomes and supports the broader goals tied to this significant federal investment, I respectfully urge the Committee to:

- Expand the pharmacist's scope to include additional disease states aligned with current clinical practice
- Authorize OTC prescribing to improve access and reduce unnecessary healthcare utilization
- Incorporate clear statutory language requiring reimbursement parity for pharmacist-provided services

These changes will help ensure pharmacists can meaningfully contribute to improving access, reducing costs, and advancing population health across Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time.

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