

The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services

Representative Susan Donovan, Chair

Representative Joshua Giraldo, First Vice Chair

Representative Brandon Potter, Second Vice Chair

Rhode Island State House

82 Smith Street

Providence, RI 02903

February 29, 2024

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 7625: Insurance Coverage for Prevention of HIV Infection

Dear Chairperson Miller and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Toni Sullo and I am a final year Doctor of Pharmacy student at the University of Rhode Island. I am writing today to express my sincere support for **House Bill 7625**, titled Insurance Coverage for Prevention of HIV. As a pharmacy student, on my public health rotation, and future pharmacist I want all of my patients to have **equitable adequate access to medications of public importance**. For HIV medications, this means:

-Permit pharmacist reimbursement for PreP/PEP services beyond medications

-Removal of "expedited" prior authorization limits

Pharmacists are often more accessible than physicians, especially in communities with limited healthcare resources or where there are shortages of primary care providers. Allowing pharmacists to prescribe PrEP can expand access to this preventive medication, particularly for individuals who face barriers to accessing traditional healthcare settings, but only if they are reimbursed for services beyond medications, like counseling and education, including information on adherence, potential side effects, and follow-up care. Allowing pharmacists to prescribe PrEP can make the process more convenient for patients, as they can receive comprehensive care in one location.

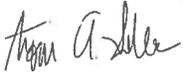
Prompt initiation of PrEP is crucial for its effectiveness in preventing HIV transmission. Pharmacists who are trained and authorized to prescribe PrEP can facilitate timely access to the medication, reducing delays in treatment initiation and improving outcomes.

Overall, compensating pharmacists for prescribing PrEP can enhance access to this important HIV prevention tool, improve health outcomes, and contribute to efforts to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS.

Having worked as a pharmacy intern in a community pharmacy for almost three years, I find myself explaining the **byzantine purpose and laborious procedure of a prior authorization** daily to patients. In most cases, prior authorizations and step therapies are put in place by insurance companies to prevent unnecessary expenditure when lower cost alternatives are available. **In the case of HIV prevention medications, the need for a prior authorization becomes obsolete.** First, there are no medical alternatives to pre-exposure prophylaxis regimens, or PrEP regimens. Moreover, these medications are used to **prevent** a person at high risk of acquiring HIV from contracting this potentially fatal virus. **Because the medications are intended for prevention, a prior authorization or step therapy approach is simply not possible.**

I urge you to vote in favor of Bill 7625.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Toni Sullo".

Toni Sullo

Doctor of Pharmacy Candidate, 2024

University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy