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April 9, 2024

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chair
House Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: H 7884 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Rhode Island’s Children Deserve Help
Not Harm Act – Minor’s Gender**

Dear Chair Donovan:

Please accept this letter in opposition to H 7884, legislation that would prohibit gender transition procedures for all minors, use of public funds for that purpose, discipline for health care providers for providing same, a thirty-year statute of limitation, and right to a civil action for damages. This act would take effect on January 1, 2025.

Were this bill to become law, any referral for or provision of gender transition procedures to an individual under eighteen years of age would be considered unprofessional conduct and subject to discipline by the appropriate licensing entity or disciplinary review board in Rhode Island. Every person who subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of this state or other person to suffer injury by violating the provisions of the proposed legislation would be liable in an action at law, suit in equity, or other appropriate proceedings for legal redress. H 7884 would authorize a minor to bring an action, through their parent or “next friend”, and in their name, upon reaching the age of majority at any time from that point until thirty years after reaching the age of majority.

In the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP’s) Policy Statement entitled “Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents” which was reaffirmed in August 2023, it is noted that any discrimination based on gender identity or expression, real or perceived, is damaging to the socioemotional health of children, families, and society.

Despite some advances in public awareness and legal protections, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) continue to face disparities that stem from multiple sources, including inequitable laws and policies, societal discrimination, and a lack of access to quality health care, including mental health care. AAP continues to recommend that youth who identify as transgender and gender diverse (TGD) have access to comprehensive, gender-affirming, and developmentally appropriate health care that is provided in a safe and inclusive clinical space.

Many medical interventions can be offered to youth who identify as TGD and their families. The decision of whether and when to initiate gender-affirming treatment is personal and involves careful consideration of risks, benefits, and other factors unique to each patient and family. Many protocols suggest that clinical assessment of youth who identify as TGD is ideally conducted on an ongoing basis in the setting of a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach, which, in addition to the patient and family, may include the pediatric provider, a mental health provider (preferably with expertise in caring for youth who identify as TGD), social and legal supports, and a pediatric endocrinologist or adolescent-medicine gender specialist,

if available. There is no prescribed path, sequence, or endpoint. The medical options also vary depending on pubertal and developmental progression.

The Trevor Project is a leading national suicide prevention and crisis intervention nonprofit organization for LGBTQ+ young people. In their recent (2023) poll, 86% of transgender and nonbinary youth reported that "recent debates around anti-transgender bills have negatively impacted their mental health; as a result of these policies and debates in the last year, 45% of transgender youth experienced cyberbullying, and nearly 1 in 3 reported not feeling safe to go to the doctor or hospital when they were sick or injured."

In the interest of protecting the health and safety of the people of our state, Rhode Island should not add to these burdens by promulgating laws that restrict its residents' healthcare options and criminalize actions of healthcare professionals that fall within the accepted standard of care guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Staci A. Fischer, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Staci Fischer, MD
Acting Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Patricia L. Morgan
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy