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February 25, 2025

Attn: Representative Donovan, Chair, House Committee on Health and Human Services and Committee Members

**Testimony to H 5354**

An Act Relating to Food and Drugs -- Milk Sanitation Code -- Sanitation in Food Establishments  
Before the House Health and Human Services Committee

Rhode Island Farm Bureau is an independent, non-governmental grassroots organization of farm families united to enhance and strengthen the lives of rural Americans, and to build strong, prosperous agricultural communities. Today our over 1000 members are not only large farmers and small farmers but also those engaged in agricultural industries, teachers of agriculture, and consumers.

- Rhode Island Farm Bureau **opposes** in part and supports in part House Bill 5354:
  - Rhode Island Farm Bureau **supports** the addition of pickles and relishes to 21-27-6.1. (3) (i) Farm home food manufacture.
  - Rhode Island Farm Bureau also **supports** 32-1-23. Taking of mushrooms from state parks, recreational areas, and forests permitted.
  - Rhode Island Farm Bureau **opposes** the Milk Sanitation Code portion of H 5354.

It is the American Farm Bureau's position that only pasteurized fluid milk should be sold or distributed for human consumption. We take no issue with the production of raw milk or raw milk products for personal consumption or consumption by immediate family members, however, we do not support the sale of raw milk to the public. As defined in Chapter 21-2-2 (9), pasteurization exists to "destroy bacteria capable of transmitting disease to people." Without this step, those consuming raw milk could easily be exposed to these unhealthy bacteria.

In March 2024, the USDA announced that 4 U.S. dairies had cattle that were infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Less than a year later, the USDA has confirmed 967 cases in 16 states, with the most recent detection being February 10, 2025. Of the 68 confirmed total reported human cases of H5N1 HPAI in the United States, 41 are people who had exposure to infected dairy cows. In a September 2024 letter to Dairy Processors, the FDA and USDA again stated that they are confident that "pasteurization is effective at inactivating H5N1 in raw milk as it is for the pathogens against which we began pasteurizing raw milk 100 years ago. Based on the information currently available during this outbreak, our commercial milk supply is safe. We respectfully request that you consider educating your customers that the pasteurization process, used for decades to kill harmful pathogens, is also effective in inactivating H5N1 in raw milk. F."

The cleanliness of a dairy and its animals does not guarantee the safety of its raw milk. Even dairy farms with very good safety practices can be affected. Healthy animals can carry illness-causing germs, such as Brucella, Campylobacter, Cryptosporidium, E. coli, Listeria, and Salmonella, all of which can contaminate milk. And even if tests on a batch of a farm's raw milk come back negative, it is no guarantee that the next batch of milk will be free of harmful germs. RI Farm Bureau supports small-scale pasteurization for small farms that wish to sell their

own milk from the farm. State-level grants to support these small dairy farms' efforts would be welcome to help this process.

We would be willing to consider the sale of raw milk at such time that the RI Dept of Health not only sets up an inspection program for raw milk, in addition to TB and Brucellosis testing for dairy cows, and the equipment used at the farm is tested using the same guidelines any licensed RI milk producer shipping raw milk to a licensed producer must follow. Please see the attached list of guidelines from one of the large milk co-ops regarding what licensed dairy farms must adhere to ensure consumer safety and animal welfare. Other co-ops have similar if not the same standards.

Both Connecticut and Massachusetts allow for raw milk sales. Please see the attachment for an overview of these states' guidelines.

The Rhode Island Farm Bureau asks that you oppose the Milk Sanitation Code portion of **H 5354** to help preserve the safety of our RI food system and protect the health of those consuming milk in our state.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry B. Wright III".

Henry B. Wright III  
President, RI Farm Bureau

Attachment: Raw Milk in CT and MA, Raw Milk Transport to Pasteurizer