



The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chairwoman
House Committee on Health and Human Services
82 Smith Street, House Lounge
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

March 13, 2025

RE: In support of H 6037 – Expanding Vaccine Access for Underserved Communities and Children

Chairwoman Donovan and Honorable Committee Members:

I am writing to express my strong support for H 6037 and to acknowledge the thoughtful amendments made to the bill by the Committee. I would also like to thank the bill sponsors for incorporating crucial recommendations, including the expansion of vaccine access to our underserved communities and children down to age 3. These changes make significant strides toward improving healthcare access, particularly for children in underserved areas.

Previously, I testified about my decades of experience working in public service roles as an advocate for underserved populations. Throughout my career, I have witnessed the growing challenges these communities face in accessing healthcare services, particularly due to the increasing shortage of primary care providers. I shared two specific examples: one involving a single undocumented father from Guatemala, who was struggling to get his two daughters, ages 6 and 14, vaccinated in time for school because he couldn't find a PCP accepting new patients; and another involving a single mother from Liberia, whose 8-year-old child with autism is on six months waiting list just to be assigned a PCP. I want to express my sincere thanks to the committee for making the necessary amendments to this bill, which will now provide families like these greater access to healthcare services. The amendments to this bill, particularly the provision that allows pharmacists to administer all childhood vaccines to individuals as young as 3 years old, are crucial in addressing healthcare disparities and will help ensure that our community members, especially children, are protected from preventable diseases and can attend school on time, alongside their peers.

As a Community Health Worker, who advocates for our underserved communities, I am encouraged by the provisions in H 6037, which now include the broader definition of the "practice of pharmacy" to encompass vaccine administration for individuals aged 3 and older. This bill not only improves vaccine access but also strengthens our healthcare system by utilizing an already existing network of trained professionals embedded within the community.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. I look forward to seeing this bill move forward and sincerely hope it will continue to reflect the needs of our community's most vulnerable populations.

Respectfully,

A blue ink signature of Barbara F. Okoro, written in a cursive style. Below the signature, the name "Barbara F. Okoro, CHW" and the organization "Asthenis" are printed in a black, sans-serif font.

Barbara F. Okoro, CHW
Asthenis