

**Written Testimony of Dr. Andrew J. DiLeo, DD, LMHC, MPC, MS Ed.**  
Before the Rhode Island House of Representatives  
Health and Human Services Committee  
Regarding Bill 2025 H 5856

**Date: March 18, 2025**

Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony in strong support of Bill 2025 H 5856, which upholds the fundamental right of Rhode Islanders to make informed choices regarding their own bodies. Whether based on religious beliefs, personal convictions, or medical concerns, bodily autonomy is a cornerstone of individual liberty and must be protected against mandates that strip away freedom of choice.

Today, while in session, we heard discussions on other sponsored bills regarding insurance coverage for those identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, no one addressed the potential increase in new autism diagnoses since the implementation of COVID-19 mandates. Similarly, there were bills introduced to ensure immediate access to mental health services, yet no testimony acknowledged the growing burden placed on mental health professionals due to the rise in PTSD cases stemming from the trauma of lockdowns, social isolation, and the fear perpetuated by conflicting guidance amid growing evidence of harm arising from the mandates about the experimental inoculation.

Recent studies have highlighted the psychological impact of COVID-19 vaccination policies. For instance, research published in *Molecular Psychiatry* indicates that COVID-19 vaccination increased the risks of depression (HR = 1.683, 95% CI [1.520–1.863]), anxiety, dissociative, stress-related, and somatoform disorders (HR = 1.439, 95% CI [1.322–1.568]), and sleep disorders (HR = 1.934, 95% CI [1.738–2.152]), while reducing the risk of schizophrenia (HR = 0.231, 95% CI [0.164–0.326]) and bipolar disorder (HR = 0.672, 95% CI [0.470–0.962]). Therefore, special caution is necessary when administering additional COVID-19 vaccinations to populations vulnerable to psychiatric adverse events (Kim, H.J., Kim, M.H., Choi, M.G., et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the unintended consequences of COVID-19 vaccine policies have been a subject of concern. An article in *BMJ Global Health* argues that current mandatory vaccine policies are scientifically questionable and are likely to cause more societal harm than good (Bardosh, K., de Figueiredo, A., Gur-Arie, R., et al., 2022).

As a mental health counselor, I witness the consequences of these mandates every day. As a minister, I see firsthand how those of faith suffered the greatest harm when state policies violated their religious freedoms—freedoms that should have been protected, not ignored.

The Rhode Island Constitution emphasizes the importance of religious freedom and individual liberties. The Preamble states:

"We, the people of the State of Rhode Island, grateful to Almighty God for the civil and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy..."

Additionally, Section 3 of the Rhode Island Constitution asserts:

"No man shall be compelled to frequent or to support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatever, except in fulfillment of his own voluntary contract; nor enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods; nor disqualified from holding any office; nor otherwise suffer on account of his religious belief..."

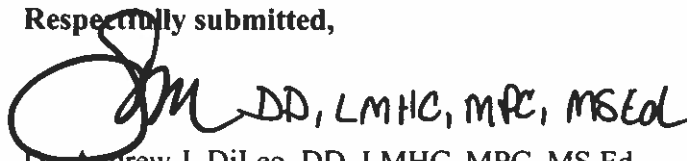
Let me be clear: When mandates are imposed without an avenue for refusal, as required by the EEOC, they cease to be public health measures and instead become instruments of tyranny. Rhode Island was founded on the principle of **Hope**—a principle embodied in the very symbol atop our State House, originally named "Hope" before it became known as the "Independent Man." Laws enacted under this emblem should inspire confidence, not strip away the hope and freedom that our state was built upon.

Our state's legacy is one of religious freedom, yet that principle was abandoned in the wake of COVID-19 mandates. The passage of Bill 2025 H 5856 would restore that legacy, ensuring that Rhode Islanders never again suffer persecution for exercising their right to refuse medical interventions that contradict their beliefs or personal well-being.

I urge this committee to pass this bill—not only to protect individual choice but to restore faith in our state's commitment to liberty, justice, and true democracy. Let Rhode Island be the leader in standing up for its people, setting the standard for other states to follow.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. DiLeo", followed by the text "DD, LMHC, MPC, MS Ed" in a similar handwritten style.

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#### References:

Bardosh, K., de Figueiredo, A., Gur-Arie, R., Jamrozik, E., Doidge, J., Lemmens, T., Keshavjee, S., Graham, J.E., Baral, S., & Larson, H.J. (2022). The unintended consequences of COVID-19 vaccine policy: Why mandates, passports, and restrictions may cause more harm than good. *BMJ Global Health*, 7(5), e008684. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-008684>

BMJ Global Health Kim, H.J., Kim, M.H., Choi, M.G., Lee, S.Y., Lee, J.U., & Lee, J.S. (2024). Psychiatric adverse events following COVID-19 vaccination: A population-based cohort study in Seoul, South Korea. *Molecular Psychiatry*, 29, 3635–3643. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-024-02627-0>