

Chairperson Robert Craven
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 5, 2024

Dear Chairperson Craven:

I am writing on behalf of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) in **strong support of H7577**, the Health Care Provider Shield Bill. The RI Section of ACOG represents more than 140 physicians and partners in reproductive health care in our state. ACOG is the leading authority on reproductive health care and is committed to public policy based on facts and evidence-based medicine. ACOG believes that all people should have access to the full spectrum of comprehensive, evidence-based health care and **opposes laws and regulations that discriminate against or otherwise marginalize these communities**. This legislation is critical to protect health care providers throughout our state as well as the patients we serve.

In addition to my role at ACOG, I am the Division Director of the Academic Generalist Obstetrics and Gynecology Division at Women & Infants Hospital. Our division is made up of over 30 physicians, nurse practitioners and midwives who work daily to provide evidence-based health care for all Rhode Islanders. We provide full scope obstetric and gynecologic health care which includes prescribing contraception, care for patients having miscarriages, gender affirming surgeries, prenatal care, abortions, treatment of sexually transmitted infection, care for patients with pelvic pain, care for those with symptomatic menopausal symptoms along with many other things. **This is all essential health care. We need to know we are protected when providing this health care and our patients need to be safe to receive it.**

This legislation is about Rhode Island's ability to continue to **protect health care providers, patients and access to essential care**. The bill protects established, best-practice medical care that is legal in Rhode Island and ensures our local providers and health care infrastructure are not negatively impacted by hostile laws in other states.

As a Division Director, part of my job is to recruit and retain health care providers to join our division to provide essential reproductive health care for all Rhode Islanders. Without passage of this bill, it will be harder for me and other division leaders in the state to compete for strong candidates to sustain our workforce as they will look for jobs in states where they will feel their ability to provide full scope ob/gyn care is better protected. It is already difficult to recruit health

care providers to Rhode Island and it is critical that we don't make it more difficult by keeping legal safety ambiguous. **It is imperative that Rhode Island remains a competitive practice environment to ensure the viability of our health delivery system. This common-sense legislation brings Rhode Island in line with 11 states, including neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut.**

More than 20 states have enacted bans on essential, established medical care which exert extraordinary control over people's lives and **even impose civil and criminal penalties on providers for practicing medicine in line with the professional standards of care.** These bans have the potential to cross state lines and impact providers here in Rhode Island. We can not let this happen.

Out-of-state laws banning access to essential medical care takes away people's freedom to make important medical decisions for themselves and their families, informed by guidance from trusted providers, and replaces it with the wishes of politicians. We have colleagues around the country who can no longer provide safe, evidence-based health care to their patients. It is imperative that we ensure that does not happen here. **Rhode Island health care providers have worked incredibly hard for their training and licenses and deserve to be able to provide unrestricted, evidence-based health care without fear of legal repercussions.**

We are grateful for the support the legislature has shown to the practice of reproductive health care over the past few years and respectfully request your continued **support through passage of H7577.** Please contact me if I can provide any additional information or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Cronin', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Beth Cronin, MD
Clinical Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology
Division Director, Division of General Obstetrics and Gynecology
Women & Infants Hospital
RI Section Chair, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists