



Chairperson Robert Craven
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
Rhode Island State House
Sent via email to HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

March 5, 2024

Re: In support of H7577

Dear Chair Craven, First Vice Chair McEntee, Second Vice Chair Knight and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of The Trevor Project in **strong support of H7577, the Health Care Provider Shield Bill**. The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ+ young people. Trevor offers 24/7 crisis services, connecting highly trained counselors with LGBTQ young people whenever they need support. And to prevent LGBTQ+ youth from reaching crisis, The Trevor Project also operates robust research, advocacy, education, and peer support programs. We thank Representative Edwards and all of the co-sponsors for bringing this important bill forward.

This legislation is about Rhode Island's ability to **protect our health care providers**, so that they can provide the best standard health care for all patients and especially transgender young people. H7577 **protects established and essential 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.

Medical providers have been providing care for transgender people for more than four decades. The latest standards of care are set forth by the [World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#) and based on decades of clinical research and experience. Their efficacy is additionally demonstrated by the positive

impact that transgender people who have access to the care report on their mental and physical health. This is why care for transgender and non-binary youth is established best practice and recommended by **every major medical and mental health association in the United States**.¹²³⁴⁵

By protecting health care providers, we also protect LGBTQ+ youth lives. Suicide is the **second leading cause of death** among young people – and LGBTQ+ youth are more than **four times as likely to attempt suicide** than their peers. The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ youth (13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. – and at least one young person attempts suicide every 45 seconds. In Rhode Island, 42% of LGBTQ youth in 2022 seriously considered suicide and 17% have attempted it. And still, half of LGBTQ+ young people who wanted mental health care were not able to access it.

Thankfully, access to the health care they need could save a young transgender person's life. A 2021 peer-reviewed study by The Trevor Project, the first large-scale study of more than 9,000 youth who received gender-affirming hormone therapy (GAHT), found that GAHT was significantly related to lower rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among transgender and nonbinary youth. Specifically for young people under age 18, receiving GAHT was associated with nearly 40% lower odds of recent depression and of a past-year suicide attempt.

Further, in February 2022, the Journal of the American Medical Association published new research that found transgender medical care for transgender teens was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up.

¹ American Medical Association, American Medical Association Fights to Protect Health Care for Transgender Patients (2021), available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/health-care-advocacy/advocacy-update/march-26-2021-state-advocacy-update>.

² American Psychiatric Association, et al., Frontline Physicians Oppose Legislation That Interferes in or Criminalizes Patient Care, American Psychiatric Association (2021), available at <https://www.aap.org/news/media-center/statements/frontline-physicians-oppose-legislation.html>.

³ American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Pediatrics Speaks Out Against Bills Harming Transgender Youth (2021), available at <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-speaks-out-against-bills-harming-transgender-youth/>.

⁴ Endocrine Society & Pediatric Endocrine Society, Discriminatory Policies Threaten Care for Transgender, Gender Diverse Individuals (2020), available at <https://www.endocrine.org/news-and-advocacy/news-room/2020/discriminatory-policies-threaten-care-for-transgender-gender-diverse-individuals>.

⁵ American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, AACAP Statement Responding to Efforts to Ban Evidence-Based Care for Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth (2019), available at https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Latest_News/AACAP_Statement_Responding_to_Efforts_to_ban_Evidence-Based_Care_for_Transgender_and_Gender_Diverse.aspx.

Despite the proven benefits of this essential health care, states across the country have banned or even criminalized health care for transgender young people, in part by threatening the very medical providers who care for these young people with lawsuits and even prison time. [More than 20 states](#) have enacted bans that **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.** And these bans are only proliferating and evolving; this year, we have already seen 105 bills introduced further limiting or penalizing this necessary health care that Rhode Island practitioners provide every day.

Fortunately, many states are acting to protect their residents and health care systems so that people can get the effective and at times life-saving care they need. Currently, [seventeen states and Washington, DC](#) have enacted shield laws to protect access to health care. Of those, fourteen states include explicit protections for gender-affirming health care, including Vermont, Colorado, California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Washington, Connecticut, Illinois, Oregon, Arizona, Maryland, and New Jersey.

It is past time for Rhode Island, the second state in the country to pass transgender nondiscrimination protections in 2002, to do the same.

Transgender young people deserve to be happy and healthy. And like all young people, they have the best chance to thrive when they are supported and can get the care they need. H7577 will protect providers, their patients, and ensure the viability of the health delivery system. We are grateful for the support the legislature has shown the provider community in the past and respectfully request your continued support through passage of this vital legislation. Please contact me at janson.wu@thetrevorproject.org if I can provide any additional information or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Janson Wu

Sr. Director of State Advocacy & Government Affairs