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March 5, 2024

Representative Robert E. Craven, Sr.  
Chair House Judiciary Committee  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
Providence, RI 02903  
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[HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov)

## **Testimony to the Committee Regarding**

### **House Bill 7577**

### **Healthcare Provider Shield Act**

Dear Chairman Craven and members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Psychological Association to express our support for H7577, the *Healthcare Provider Shield Act*. More than twenty states are now limiting the right of their citizens to obtain the reproductive or gender affirming healthcare they need, and some of these states are seeking to limit people's ability to travel to get care they cannot get at home. Some of these states seek to make healthcare professionals in states that do not have their restrictions and who are practicing within their scope of practice and laws in their state criminally liable for providing care to people who may have some connection to another state. It is essential that the General Assembly act to ensure that everyone in Rhode Island has access to the medical care they need and that Rhode Island licensed healthcare professionals are protected from prosecution or other forms of harassment from states that seek to limit people's access to care outside of their state boundaries.

H7577 Healthcare Provider Shield Bill seeks to ensure that Rhode Island healthcare professionals are protected in their duty to provide empirically based and ethical care to all their patients. This bill will:

- Make it clear that access to reproductive health care and essential medical care for transgender people are legal rights in Rhode Island

- Protect Rhode Island health care providers from abusive civil or criminal litigation from other states
- Protect Rhode Islanders from having their information about protected health care shared with law enforcement agencies in other states where such care is banned
- Ensure Rhode Island providers aren't unfairly penalized by health care institutions or insurance for providing legally protected health care consistent with the professional standards of care
- Protect providers from surveillance that could negatively impact their ability to provide legally protected care
- Protect all providers involved in delivering legally protected transgender and reproductive health care in Rhode Island consistent with the standards of care, including care via telehealth
- Ensure Rhode Island's resources are not used to further hostile litigation from states where essential health care is banned

This bill is particularly relevant for psychologists. We are ethically bound to address laws that would compromise our ability to provide an appropriate standard of care or undermine human rights (American Psychological Association Ethics Code Section 1.02)<sup>1</sup>. The American Psychological Association has also adopted resolutions guiding us on the importance of confidentiality in reproductive health care<sup>2</sup> and of the scientific evidence supporting affirming care for transgender, gender diverse and non-binary individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Rhode Island psychologists and all healthcare providers are ethically obligated to provide the highest standard of care to all their patients and not to compromise that care under the threat of sanction from laws imposed from other jurisdictions. We have patients who relocate to Rhode Island or may relocate to other states from Rhode Island who could put us at risk of sanctions from other states. We also provide telehealth

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<sup>1</sup>American Psychological Association (2010), Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/principles.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>American Psychological Association (Feb 2023) (APA Resolution on Confidentiality and Reproductive Health, <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/resolution-confidentiality-reproductive-health.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> American Psychological Association (Feb 2024) APA Policy Statement on Affirming Evidence-Based Inclusive Care for Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Nonbinary Individuals, Addressing Misinformation, and the Role of Psychological Practice and Science, <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/transgender-nonbinary-inclusive-care.pdf>



services to people in other states (by virtue of being dually licensed to practice in other states or the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT)<sup>4</sup>).

These laws in other states intrude upon Rhode Island's right to regulate healthcare professions in the interest of our community. Rhode Island has a history of thoughtful and effective regulation that is based on science and ethical standards. This bill will help to preserve that tradition and that serves the interests of Rhode Islanders.

Everyone in the state of Rhode Island who is receiving care from a Rhode Island healthcare professional deserves access to the highest standards of care our healthcare providers and service systems can provide. It is imperative that our state government protects our ability to provide the best care to everyone in our care. Please support H7577-*the Healthcare Provider Shield Act*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter M. Oppenheimer Ph.D.".

Peter M. Oppenheimer, Ph.D.

Clinical Psychologist

Director of Professional Affairs  
Rhode Island Psychological Association

Chair, Board of Psychology  
Commissioner and State Administrator  
Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact  
Rhode Island Department of Health

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<sup>4</sup> Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact, RIGL 5-44.1 (2023),  
<https://webserver.rilegislature.gov//Statutes/TITLE5/5-44.1/INDEX.htm>.