

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

March 5, 2024

Dear Chairperson Craven and the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing in strong support of the Representative Edwards' Health Care Provider Shield Bill, H7577. I am a professor of social work at Rhode Island College where I teach clinical practice and train the next generation of clinical social workers. This legislation is critical to ensure that mental health professionals can provide appropriate, evidence-based care to their clients, without worrying about legal action taken by out of state zealots who should have no role in Rhode Island medical care. As a state with a health care provider crisis, we must ensure we train clinical social workers who feel comfortable providing the care their patients need and deserve. This Shield Bill, like one passed in 11 other states including our neighbors, could provide the protection we need.

States throughout the country have passed legislation to ban essential care, jail medical personnel and their patients, and threaten the licenses of those providing legal, evidence-based health care. I trust the RI legislature will not do that. However, as a social work educator, I am not surprised that students training to provide care to marginalized and targeted groups in RI are worried that other states' bans could impact them here. They see the threat; they see the fear and chaos created for patients and health care providers in other states; they worry about their future workforce participation in Rhode Island. The Shield Bill would provide the confidence they need to open their practices here in RI.

We are training a diverse population of excellent future clinicians to meet an overwhelming need for mental health care. We must protect those providers, so our patients have access to essential care. We simply can't afford to lose any practitioners to other states who have understood the threat from out of state sources and have protected their right to practice.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter. I urge you to vote H7577 out of committee and on to the House floor.

Sincerely,

Wendy Becker, PhD, LICSW
Rhode Island College School of Social Work