



Honorable Chair McEntee of the
House Committee on Judiciary
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H7548

February 11, 2026

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians (RIAFP), I write in strong support of House Bill 7548, which seeks to protect healthcare providers who express apology, sympathy, or compassion in the wake of unanticipated medical outcomes.

The RIAFP represents more than 300 Family Physicians in Rhode Island. Our members care for patients across outpatient clinics, hospital wards, emergency departments, labor and delivery units, nursing facilities, and in operating rooms. The scope of Family Medicine physicians is broad and we walk with patients through every stage of life. Unanticipated medical outcomes can take many forms for a Family Medicine physician, and in those moments, compassion and honesty matter.

As is the policy of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), physicians have an ethical responsibility to disclose unanticipated outcomes with compassionate, timely communication. Both the AAFP and the American Medical Association (AMA) support laws making expressions of apology and regret inadmissible as evidence of liability. This bill is aligned with longstanding medical ethics.

We know from published research—including a 2021 article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*—that many physicians hesitate to apologize or fully disclose because they fear malpractice litigation. That fear creates moral distress, fuels burnout, and erodes patient trust. The evidence tells us something else important: when disclosure is paired with apology and empathy, litigation does not increase—and may decrease. The University of Michigan's well-known disclosure and early resolution model led to fewer malpractice claims, lower legal costs, faster resolution, and improved patient satisfaction. Transparency and compassion work.

As of 2024, 39 states and the District of Columbia have enacted "I'm Sorry" laws. Rhode Island should not lag behind. This bill does not shield negligence. It does not prevent patients from

seeking accountability. It simply ensures that a sincere expression of sympathy is not twisted into an admission of liability.

Patients deserve transparency. Physicians deserve the ability to practice medicine consistent with their ethical duty—without being advised by counsel to withhold basic human compassion.

House Bill 7548 supports honesty, healing, and trust. For our patients and for the physicians who care for them, we respectfully urge its passage.

Sincerely,

Katharina de Klerk, DO
RIAFP President-Elect and Advocacy Committee Chair