

TO: House Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Diane Barensen
RE: Testimony **in support of H7357**
DATE: March 9, 2026

Dear Chair McEntee and honorable members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Diane Barensen. I live in Barrington, at 43 Houghton Street, where I have lived for forty years. I am a retired member of the Planned Parenthood Votes! RI board. I am testifying in support of H7357, whose lead sponsor is Representative Knight. Before going further, I should note that I had an illegal abortion in 1968, when I was a 19-year old college sophomore. In vivid detail, I recall what I was doing on January 22, 1973, when the US Supreme Court issued its opinion in Roe v. Wade. I felt unrestrained joy and hope. In addition, I am the step-grandmother of a trans man. Though he does not live in RI and thus would not be affected by this bill, I have cherished him from the time he was born 27 years ago and am a witness to his struggles as a child and to his feeling of liberation when he came out 9 years ago. He is thriving; he almost certainly would not be thriving had he not transitioned. His journey has enlightened me to the necessity of robust support for gender-affirming care.

H7357 is critically important for protecting sensitive consumer health data regarding reproductive and gender-affirming health care, especially considering the 2022 Dobbs US Supreme Court decision overturning Roe and the subsequent dramatic increase in attacks on reproductive and gender affirming care access across this country. With the passage of the Healthcare Provider Shield Act in 2024, Rhode Island codified into law the protection of RI's reproductive and gender-affirming care providers from out-of-state legal interference; the passage of H7357 will codify data protection for people seeking that legally protected health care.

The right to privacy is guaranteed in both the US and RI constitutions. But HIPAA protects only personally identifiable health-related data collected by healthcare

providers. Employers, retailers, fitness apps, and period trackers may well not be subject to HIPAA. H7357 will offer people more control over their personal data generated through these means, means that can be used to glean information about a person's pregnancy status or gender identity.

Roe v. Wade is history. But Rhode Islanders didn't give up. In 2019, in anticipation of Roe being overturned, we passed the Reproductive Privacy Act. In 2023 we passed the Equality in Abortion Coverage Act. In 2024 we passed the Health Care Provider Shield Act. Let's take the next step: in this legislative session let's pass the Reproductive Freedom and Gender-Affirming Care Health Data Privacy Act! I urge you to vote YES on H7357.

Many thanks for your time and consideration.