



RHODE ISLAND MEDICAL SOCIETY

Date: February 7, 2023
From: Rhode Island Medical Society
To: House Committee on State Government & Elections
Chairman Evan Shanley
Members of the Committee
Subject: **RIMS support for HB 5266**

Dear Chairman Shanley and Members of the Committee,

Founded in 1812, the Rhode Island Medical Society (RIMS) is the eighth oldest medical society in the country. RIMS is the vehicle by which the medical community in Rhode Island meets the evolving challenges of medical practice and quality patient care.

RIMS supports HB 5266 because we support easier accessibility for citizens to participate in public meetings. Especially for individuals 65 and over, making public meetings more accessible can ultimately be safer for some citizens (as they decide as medically necessary). Recently, RIMS expressed our thoughts to the Governor's Commission on Disabilities on their request for comments related to updating its regulations on Open Meetings, R.I. Gen. Law § 42-46-5ⁱ. Here are our comments to the commission:

RIMS views R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-5 as outdated and in need of updating. Requiring in-person attendance for any citizen to attend a public meeting is unreasonable in a time where the world has adapted to a virtual meeting setting. Requiring in-person attendance for lower health risk tolerance citizens may not be safe either. Citizens with a lower health risk tolerance looking to participate in public meetings should be considered when looking to update these regulations. These are individuals who, for whatever reason, should not be excluded from participation because they wanted to be safe and participate in a physical environment they are able to control, like their homes. Their ability to participate should have minimal if not no barriers at all and their actions could keep others safe too.

Also, for citizens who serve on public bodies, requiring a citizen to obtain a medical note from their physician in order to be granted a waiver has inherent flaws, especially considering that "waiver decisions shall be a matter of public record," as stated in the regulation. The health status of a citizen should have its limitations in the public record. Additionally, these citizens may have to expose themselves to greater health concerns by entering their physician's office to obtain a medical note. It seems counterintuitive that a medical note from a citizen's physician about medical excuse or risk should then be judged by an administrator as to its worthiness or reasonableness.

Finally, we believe that a disability should be defined even further in R.I. Gen. Law § 42-87-1ⁱⁱ, adding that a disability should include respecting the choice of an individual to avoid indoor gathering due to higher risk of adverse effects from communicable diseases.

We look forward to providing additional information or answering any question you might have.

Thank you,

Thomas A. Bledsoe, MD, MACP
President, Rhode Island Medical Society

ⁱ <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE42/42-46/42-46-5.htm>

ⁱⁱ <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE42/42-87/42-87-1.htm>