

Steven Sepe

From: Caitlin Kennedy <ckennedy591@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 2, 2026 12:54 PM
To: House Health and Human Services Committee
Cc: Rep. Donovan, Susan R; Rep. Giraldo, Joshua J.; Rep. Potter, Brandon C.; Rep. Ackerman, Mia A.; Rep. Bennett, David A.; Rep. Boylan, Jennifer; Rep. Fogarty, Kathleen A.; Rep. Cotter, Megan L.; Rep. Handy, Arthur; Rep. Hopkins, Marie A.; Rep. Kislak, Rebecca M.; Rep. McGaw, Michelle E.; Rep. Place, David J.; Rep. Speakman, June; Rep. Stewart, Jennifer A.; Rep. Shekarchi, K Joseph; Rep. Casimiro, Julie A.; Rep. Solomon, Joseph J. Jr.; Rep. Morales, David; Lynne Urbani; Chris Federico; Rhode Island Pharmacists Association
Subject: SUPPORT - H7534

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Dear Chair Donovan and Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services,

I am a practicing pharmacist working in primary care and population health management, and I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill H-7534. This bill expands access to pharmacist-provided smoking cessation services and establishes a sustainable pathway for coverage and payment for these evidence-based interventions.

Rhode Island faces significant challenges related to tobacco use, particularly among patients with chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, COPD, and asthma. Smoking cessation is one of the most effective strategies for reducing preventable morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs. However, many patients—especially those covered by Medicaid—face barriers to accessing timely cessation support.

House Bill H-7534 appropriately authorizes qualified, licensed pharmacists to prescribe and dispense FDA-approved tobacco cessation therapies within a clearly defined regulatory framework. The bill ensures these services are delivered in accordance with Board of Pharmacy rules and regulations and is subject to approval by the Director of Health, in consultation with behavioral health leadership. This structure provides appropriate oversight while allowing pharmacists to practice at the top of their training in a safe, evidence-based manner.

Importantly, H-7534 establishes a pathway for Medicaid coverage of tobacco cessation drug therapies upon approval of the state's Section 1115 demonstration waiver. This approach aligns smoking cessation policy with broader Medicaid transformation efforts and ensures that coverage decisions are implemented thoughtfully, in coordination with existing federal and state oversight processes.

From a primary care and population health perspective, Medicaid coverage of pharmacist-provided smoking cessation therapies is essential. Patients insured by Medicaid experience disproportionately high rates of tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases, yet often have limited access to preventive services. By enabling pharmacist-led cessation services with appropriate coverage, we can improve access to care for patients who may struggle to attend frequent primary care visits. This also helps prevent downstream complications that contribute to emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and long-term healthcare costs.

In primary care and ambulatory settings, pharmacists already play a crucial role in providing smoking cessation counseling, initiating and managing FDA-approved cessation medications, monitoring treatment response, and providing ongoing follow-up in coordination with primary care and behavioral health teams. Establishing Medicaid

coverage ensures these services can be delivered consistently and equitably, rather than on an ad hoc or unfunded basis.

House Bill H-7534 reflects how smoking cessation care is currently being delivered effectively in team-based models and aligns Rhode Island with other states that recognize pharmacist-provided cessation services as a core component of comprehensive tobacco control strategies. By pairing clear regulatory oversight with a responsible pathway to Medicaid coverage, this legislation strengthens primary care capacity while improving outcomes for Rhode Island patients.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support H-7534 and advance this important legislation. Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of policies that improve access to preventive, evidence-based care across Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Kennedy, PharmD, MHA

Warwick, RI