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Providence, RI 02908-5097

TTY: 771
www.health.ri.gov

April 9, 2026

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chair
House Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 7626-- An Act Relating to Health and Safety – *The Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act Of 2026*

Dear Chair Donovan:

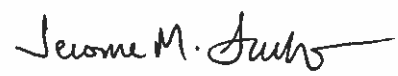
Please accept this letter, with concerns, regarding H 7626, legislation that would establish the *Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act of 2026*, to establish permanent statewide support for maternal health and to implement the maternal health strategic plan to improve maternal healthcare and access. The act would take effect upon passage.

Although the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) appreciates the intent of the legislation, it has the following concerns:

- This bill requires staff time to support the development, implementation, and sustainability of the Rhode Island Maternal Health Advisory Board. While some elements of the Advisory Board are like the existing RIDOH Maternal Health Taskforce (established in 2023 to fulfill the terms of the State Maternal Health Innovation federal grant), membership in the Advisory Board is identified as seven Governor and Legislator-appointed members with budget, procurement, and reporting requirements. Supporting an Advisory Board would be a new activity for RIDOH and would require a new FTE.
- The bill calls for modernization of the maternal health data system to include a surveillance unit; contracts with academic, clinical or community partners; and collecting and reporting data from licensed maternity care providers, hospitals, and community birth workers. Modernization of maternal health data system would be a new activity for RIDOH and would require a minimum of 1.5 FTEs and significant enhancements to RIDOH's birthing hospital surveillance system.
- The bill establishes a comprehensive maternal health workforce development program that would require a minimum of 1 FTE and workforce development funding.
- The bill directs RIDOH to provide competitive awards grants for community maternal health access for prenatal navigation services, doula and community birth workers, transportation assistance, and postpartum supports. This activity would require a minimum of 1 program FTE, 1 fiscal/procurement FTE, and funds for community-based contracts.

It is critical to identify and secure the funding necessary to make and sustain the provisions included in H 7626. In the absence of such funding, RIDOH will be unable to effectuate its goals. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerome M. Larkin" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jerome M. Larkin, MD
Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services
The Honorable Lauren H. Carson
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy