

April 9, 2026

Dear Chair Donovan and Members of the House and Human Services committee,

I'm writing today as a parent, community member, physician and concerned Rhode Islander in strong support of HB 7940 (Rep Kislak). *Rhode Island's current health insurance law lacks sufficient protection against discrimination* - currently our protections only cover race, color, or creed - leaving thousands of Rhode Islanders (including me, my family, friends and patients) vulnerable.

I am incredibly grateful for the work your committee and the Rhode Island Legislature as a whole has done over the years to ensure that Rhode Islanders can access necessary health care. However, with the current actions of the federal government weakening protections for civil rights, many Rhode Islanders are at risk of losing access to necessary services. In May 2025, the Department of Health and Human services removed guidance that clarified that the Affordable Care Act's non-discrimination provisions prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and they have done work to further limit access to gender-affirming care. As an Ob/Gyn who provides gender affirming care in our state, I can confirm my patients are terrified and truly at risk of losing their access to health care and other basic protections.

This bill will update unfair discrimination statutes to **encompass more protected categories and protect against additional forms of discrimination**. The protected categories will be expanded to include actual or perceived: race; ethnicity; color; religion; national origin, including language; sex, including sex characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions; age; disability; height; weight; or any combination thereof. It will include the prohibition of discriminatory practices beyond claim denials to now include discriminatory plan designs and enrollment determinations. Lastly, it will ensure accountability by requiring health care entities to provide a clear grievance process for enrollees who have experienced discrimination.

Given the decisions made at the federal level, Rhode Islanders are increasingly at risk of being denied coverage, charged higher costs, or subjected to discriminatory health plan designs based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, or other personal characteristics. This legislation ensures that **all** residents receive fair and equitable access to medically necessary care, holds insurers accountable for discriminatory practices, and protects Rhode Islanders where the federal government refuses to act. I strongly encourage you to pass this legislation to allow my family, friends and patients to sleep better at night knowing that here we will not be discriminated against when trying to access health care due to our sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability or race, ethnicity or language. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth Cronin