

Senate Finance Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

May 19, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of Senate bill 2101, titled An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- The Medical Primary Care Scholarship Program.

Dear Chairperson DiPalma and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am Thomas Meehan, PhD, PA-C from Barrington and Senate District 32. I am also the Program Director for the Physician Assistant Program at Johnson & Wales University which became the first University in Rhode Island to offer a PA program in 2014. With graduation this year, the program has graduated 357 PAs.

I support Senate bill 2101, titled An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- The Medical Primary Care Scholarship Program

I support bill 2101...

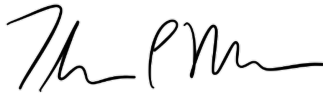
- Primary care practice in Rhode Island is at a critical junction with a current and emergent deficit in primary care practitioners at the MD, PA, and NP level. Even if you can find a provider that is taking new patients, the wait times for appointments are many months. The best medicine is preventative to avoid developing disease and not reactive. This is the focus of primary care.
- The Johnson & Wales PA program currently graduates 35 students per year. Of these graduates, about 10 practice in Rhode Island and only 4 practice in primary care in Rhode Island.
- The average Physician Assistant graduate comes out of school with about \$120K in combined undergraduate and graduate student loans. The starting salary in primary care practice for a PA is 17% lower than specialty practice. For this reason, some students choose to practice in specialty practice over primary care. Nationally, only 23% of PAs practice in primary care and this number has steady declined over the last decade. In Rhode Island, this number is only 18% out of 648 certified PAs.
- Additionally, PA students will no longer be eligible for the maximum in federal student loans. The new student loan rules eliminate the grad plus loan and PA is not designated as a profession opening up additional federal funding. Students will have to turn to the private student loan market with less favorable rates and requirements for credit worthiness. This is most likely to impact the student from an economically disadvantaged background. These are the same students that would be likely to stay and practice back in their communities.
- Bill 2101 would support 5 scholarships for PA students who are willing to practice in primary care in Rhode Island upon graduation. For each year of school (2 years for the JWU PA program), students would receive \$47,000 which would significantly improve the financial burden upon graduation. For these two years of scholarship, PA graduates would practice in Rhode Island in primary care for 4 years (2 per year of scholarship). Once established in primary care, PAs will tend to stay in their practice setting.

- Finally, I want to note that once PAs choose a specialty, they typically stay in that specialty throughout their career. 69% of PAs have changed fewer than 2 times.

I urge you to vote in favor of bill 2101.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of bill 2101.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Th Meehan', written in a cursive style.

Thomas Meehan, PhD, PA-C

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Barrington, RI 02806  
Senate District 32