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May 28, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma, Chair  
Senate Committee on Finance  
State House  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: S 2358 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – The Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act of 2026**

Dear Chair DiPalma:

Please accept this letter with concerns regarding S 2358, legislation that would establish the *Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act of 2026* and establish permanent statewide support for maternal health and 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 on 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 the 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 competitively awarded 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 S 2358. As drafted, the legislation would appropriate funding "out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated for the fiscal year." In the absence of a more secure source of funding, RIDOH will be unable to effectuate the goals of the legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

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

Jerome M. Larkin, MD

Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Finance  
The Honorable Dawn Euer  
Kristen Silvia, Director of Legislation and Deputy Chief of Staff  
Patricia Resende, Director of Senate Policy