

Melissa L Russo MD FACOG

Rhode Island Section American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists (ACOG)

Barrington, RI

March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Murray and Members of the Senate HHS Committee:

My name is Melissa Russo, I am from Barrington, RI. I am a maternal-fetal medicine specialist, clinical geneticists, and obstetrician who has served patients in Rhode Island for the past nine years. I am writing on behalf of my patients and additionally the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) in **strong support of House Bill S2003** “An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions--- Protections of Healthcare Providers Act”

ACOG maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members; strongly advocates for equitable, exceptional, and respectful care for all women and people in need of obstetric and gynecologic care; promotes patient education; and increases awareness among its members and the public of critical issues facing patients and their families and communities. ACOG is a leading authority on reproductive health care and is committed to public policy based on facts and evidence-based medicine. ACOG believes that all people should have access to the full spectrum of comprehensive, evidence-based health care. Access to the full spectrum of medical care, including abortion, is essential for the health and well-being of families in Rhode Island. Physicians and other clinicians must be permitted to provide evidence-based medical care without outside interference or fear of criminalization.

To date, the state of Rhode Island has made many strides in expanding access to abortion and shielding clinicians from prosecution. This bill would be in furtherance of these efforts and build on Rhode Island’s existing laws, thus allowing Rhode Island residents equitable access without unnecessary logistical barriers. ACOG has long advocated to improve access to safe abortion and affirms that abortion is an essential component of reproductive health care. Abortion care is uniquely targeted by violence, stigma, and marginalization and clinicians contend with exceptional challenges in provision of these services. Increasingly, states with restrictive abortion laws are moving towards dangerous legal practices and criminalizing pregnancy in general. These out-of-state hostile actors are also attempting to criminalize clinicians, both in their own state and those who provide abortion care for people from other states. These measures confer additional significant tangible threats on clinicians. Criminalizing healthcare providers for doing their jobs, providing evidence-based, necessary care, not only harms them (obviously), but also negatively impacts people who need access to needed services. Additionally, targeting and criminalizing specific sectors of healthcare, i.e. abortion exceptionalism, puts providers in the unwieldy position of having to weigh providing needed care versus assuming the threats of fines, licensure suspension or revocation, and jail.

The Rhode Island Section of ACOG asks that this committee vote in support of Rhode Island’s ongoing efforts to protect access to safe and effective abortion care which will institute a simple measure to ensure provider confidentiality and further protect providers giving care in the state of Rhode Island. We ask that you vote in favor of passage of **House Bill S2003** “An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions--- Protections of Healthcare Providers Act”.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa L Russo MD

RI Section Vice Chair, ACOG

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key statistics from the National Survey of Family Growth. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/key_statistics/i.htm#infertilityservices.