

Rhode Island Chapter

INCORPORATED IN RHODE ISLAND

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Officers

President

Scott Rivkees, MD, FAAP
Phone: 203/641-2545
scott_rivkees@brown.edu

Vice President

Michael Koster, MD, FAAP
Phone: 401/444-8360
michael_koster@brown.edu

Secretary

Shuba Kamath, MD, FAAP
Phone: 401/444-8531
shuba_kamath@brown.edu

Treasurer

Sara Ford, MD, FAAP
Phone: 401/444-4612
SFord@lifespan.org

Immediate Past President

Peter Pogacar, MD, FAAP
Phone: 401/884-8900
prpogacar@gmail.com

Chapter Executive Director

Jennifer L. Mann, MPH
Phone: 401/743-1507
jmann.aapri@gmail.com

Board of Directors

Emily Allen, MD, FAAP
Allison Brindle, MD, FAAP
Ailis Clyne, MD, FAAP
Susan Duffy, MD, FAAP
Gregory Fox, MD, FAAP
Robert Griffith Jr., MD, FAAP
Allison, Heinly, MD, FAAP
Pamela High, MD, FAAP
Chandan Lakhiani, MD, FAAP
Elizabeth Lange, MD, FAAP
Kristin Lombardi, MD, FAAP
Karen Maule, MD, FAAP
Beth Toolan, MD, FAAP

Mailing Address:

American Academy of Pediatrics
Rhode Island Chapter
PO Box 20365
Cranston, RI 02920

To: Senate Health and Human Services Committee

From: Scott A. Rivkees, MD

President, Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Date 2/26/2026

Testimony in SUPPORT of S 2379 and S 2568

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I am Scott Rivkees, a pediatrician, pediatric endocrinologist, and President of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am the former State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health for the State of Florida.

The first patient I cared for as a pediatric resident at Massachusetts General Hospital in 1982 was a young boy who developed encephalitis due to chickenpox, who was left with lasting brain injury. That was before we had a vaccine against chickenpox, which was introduced in 1996.

I also cared for children, some of whom died, and some of whom were left neurologically devastated due to meningitis. That was before the introduction of the meningitis vaccine in 2005.

I also cared for a child who died from rotavirus. That was before the introduction of a vaccine against that illness in 2006.

I also cared for children who developed liver failure due to hepatitis A. That was before the hepatitis A vaccine was approved in 1995.

These and other vaccine-preventable illnesses are real and not cute or adorable illnesses for children to endure at summer camp.

And now, we have to ask ourselves, are we going to allow children to face, suffer, die from, or be left neurologically impaired from these vaccine-preventable diseases, as the number of childhood vaccines recommended by the CDC Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices is trimmed by nearly one-third, a non-evidence-based change universally opposed by the medical community.

Having been in government service, with millions of children under my watchful eye, I fear that we will regress to a time when boys and girls will not reach their deserved full potential, as the recommendations of the CDC ACIP turn their back on children.

Let us also consider what we are seeing at the national level, as vaccine recommendations are weakened and parents are left confused. Incredibly, we are now seeing serious vaccine-preventable illnesses blossom like never before. In 2025, there were more than 2000 cases of measles. Two months into 2026, there are more than 1,000 measles cases. This is just the tip of the iceberg, as we are now seeing increases in pertussis and meningitis. It is also feared that we soon will begin to see increased cases of polio, rotavirus, RSV, tetanus, rubella, hepatitis B, and diphtheria.

Rhode Island can take pride in having one of the highest, if not the highest, childhood vaccination rates in the country. This is due to the incredible actions of the RI Department of Health, pediatric providers in our state, and policies that have been put in place to ensure that our children have access to recommended vaccines.

Let's keep Rhode Island the leader that it is. Let us not slide back to the pre-vaccine era, where so many of the children I cared for in the early stages of my career died from vaccine-preventable illnesses.

This is why I support the current legislation, which proposes that the state's childhood vaccine recommendations be based on the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendations, with guidance from the Department of Health's director and an advisory committee of experts. We also need to ensure that the recommended vaccines remain available to children and are covered by commercial insurance and Medicaid at no additional cost to the family, as they are now.

Thank you,

Scott A. Rivkees, MD