

My name is Howard Schulman, MD. I've been an adult primary care physician, a general internist, in Rhode Island since 1995.

I am testifying in support of Senate Bill S 2459. At the moment, out-of-state financial corporations are targeting Rhode Island's healthcare organizations aggressively, and if you don't address the threats addressed by this bill, in this session, it may be too late.

You have to believe me when I say this, that the trust between a provider and a patient is extremely important, and once this is lost, the whole healthcare system breaks down, from the patient's perspective, and from the provider's perspective.

The reason why it makes sense for a provider, and not a corporation, to spend more time with patient and make the extra effort to do the right thing, is that for providers it's just human nature and personal to do the right thing for the people that live in our community. It is natural to want to maintain a reputation.

Additionally, providers typically live where they work and have a very difficult time changing jobs due to the hassles with licensing, and getting credentialed by the insurance companies as well as learning the local environment and patients, and also moving their homes. Therefore providers, and not corporations, have huge incentives to do the right thing.

I can't tell you how easy it is to be more efficient in the office. I just have to tell patients after 15 minutes they have to leave and maybe come back the next day to finish up the session and pay another co-pay and charge for another session. Or maybe when patients remember another problem they want to run by me, which happens all day long, I can just ignore them. Additionally, with an interest in staying around the community long term, I am much less likely to discharge patients from my practice and send them to an aggressive debt collection service. Private equity is well-known for doing that.

It's so much easier to send a patient off to spend 12 hours in the emergency room or wait a month to see a consultant or order an MRI or give them an antibiotic which I know will not help them, as opposed to spending more time trying to figure out what's going on, educating patients and taking care of the problem right in front of me.

Not infrequently, patients are better-off not having their back operated on or rotator cuffs fixed or their knees replaced. Not everyone with a headache and a sore back needs an MRI. Not infrequently, older patients towards to the end of their lives don't need screening colonoscopies or even low grade prostate cancers treated or every cataract surgically removed, if they are having no symptoms.

Additionally, spending on healthcare is something like 18% of our economy, and for all the profits going to out-of-state owners, the state is missing taxation on that income. Additionally, all the money going to out of state corporate investors doesn't get reinvested and reused in the local economy as far as buying a house here, buying groceries, raising a family, shopping, and spending money in local businesses. Or even re-investing in the local Rhode Island healthcare economy.

Lastly, private equity already owns much more of our healthcare economy than many people here realize, never mind the general public, and I am just as concerned or more about that and how this bill would affect those medical practices. I am guessing that our own Department of Health needs to be much more involved in the corporatization of healthcare in Rhode Island. There are also issues with certain healthcare organizations not being subject to state laws, as opposed to Federal law, that may be of concern.