Testimony in Support of S2468/H7539 by Himanshu Kaushik (Brown Medical Student)

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Himanshu Kaushik, and I am a third-year medical student at Brown University here in Providence, Rhode Island. I also serve as Co-President of the NORD Students for Rare chapter at Brown, where I have been involved in advocacy efforts across the state, including helping write and bring the Rhode Island Rare Disease Advisory Council legislation to life.

I am here today to strongly support Senate Bill S2468, the Benefit Determination and Utilization Review Act for Step therapy patient protections.

My connection to rare disease began early—some of my close friends in high school lived with rare conditions, and I saw how uncertain and isolating that journey can be. But through medical training, I've come to understand something even deeper. Even "common" diseases like diabetes, heart failure, and kidney failure are already devastating for patients and families. Now imagine having a disease where you don't even know what you have for many years, and once you finally do, you still cannot access the treatment your doctor knows you need.

Rare disease patients often spend years on what we call a diagnostic odyssey—searching for answers, seeing multiple specialists, and undergoing countless tests. They should not then be blocked from receiving effective care due to step therapy requirements.

Our proposed Act is critical because it directly addresses these barriers. It would prohibit step therapy from being applied to medications prescribed for rare diseases, ensuring that patients with limited treatment options can access the therapies they need without delay. It also protects patients more broadly by requiring insurers to base step therapy protocols on sound medical guidance, provide meaningful exceptions that take into account a patient's medical history, and respond to those exception requests in a clear and expedited timeline.

These are not just administrative fixes—they are protections that prevent real harm. Step therapy can delay necessary treatment, force patients onto ineffective medications, and in the case of rare diseases, lead to irreversible progression. Not to mention, Step therapy is decreasing efficiency for all parties involved in different categories like mentally, financially, and medically, among others.

This bill would significantly reduce barriers to care for rare disease patients—patients who already face extraordinary challenges just to receive a diagnosis, let alone an effective therapy. It also moves Rhode Island from failing to leading, improving our state's step therapy protections from an "F" to an "A."

As a future physician, I want to practice in a system where clinical decision-making is guided by what is best for the patient—not delayed by insurance barriers.

I respectfully urge you to support S2468 to ensure that Rhode Islanders, especially those with rare diseases, can access timely, necessary, and life-saving care.

Thank you for your time and consideration.