



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island

Senate Bill 3064

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

March 23, 2026

Chairwoman Murray and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on establishing the framework to create a medical school at the University of Rhode Island and provide an initial appropriation of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) as the first phase of a multi-year investment for the development of a medical school, as Senate Bill 3064 would do.

It is estimated that 300 additional primary care providers are needed statewide, while almost half of our current practicing physicians are approaching retirement age. Recent figures suggest that between 200,000 and 400,000 adults in the state of Rhode Island do not have access to primary care services.

A well-educated and highly skilled workforce is essential to universal and equitable health care access. In addition, the health care system needs an optimal balance of primary care providers and specialists, and enough of each in all geographic areas. The U.S. faces shortages of various health care personnel. These shortages are distributed unequally across the country. Most notably, nurse aides, Registered Nurses, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, and primary care physicians are in short supply. The lack of primary care providers is especially problematic because they play a central role in managing care for individuals with chronic conditions.

State investment in a public medical school at URI could result in an increase in primary care physicians practicing in our state. However, it is our belief that without adequate incentive programs aimed at keeping physicians practicing in our state, this endeavor may not yield better results than our existing institutions.

The URI Medical Education Feasibility Study found that the state of Rhode Island struggles to retain medical students after graduation, with approximately 14% staying in Rhode Island. Brown University's Medical School website claims that 8% of all Rhode Island practicing physicians graduated from their institution. Brown University is the only medical school in state so the other 92% of Rhode Island physicians graduated from out-of-state universities. Recruiting over 90% of our physician workforce from other states is not sustainable. Rhode Island must investigate ways to attract medical students to our state and keep them working here upon graduation. A Public Medical School could be an important step towards more aspiring physicians coming to Rhode Island, however, without a plan to retain them we will be no better off than we are today.



AARP Rhode Island would be supportive of a Public Medical School at the University of Rhode Island if it could be ensured that the state's investment would produce more primary care physicians in our communities. Without adequate incentives to keep trained physicians practicing in Rhode Island, this potential school may yield no more than the 8% that Brown University's school provides to the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Netto".

Matt Netto

Mnetto@aarp.org / 401-834-0524