

March 24, 2026

Senate Health & Human Services Committee

State of Rhode Island General Assembly

82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of S3064, which proposes providing initial funding to establish a public medical school at the University of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island's primary care crisis is among the greatest public health challenges facing our state. The shifting demographics of the state and changing health system landscape have left far too many Rhode Islanders without access to basic preventative health services and denied many their entry point into the health system entirely. Approximately 200,000-400,000 Rhode Islanders are currently without a Primary Care Provider (PCP)¹, and clinical providers within our system continue to be overworked by the significant strain of demand, putting them at higher risk of burning out, leaving the workforce, or leaving the state.

RIPHI owns and operates the Open Door Health (ODH) clinic in South Providence. While we make every effort to ensure we maintain a shorter-than-average wait time, our practitioners have received hundreds of calls over the last year from prospective patients desperately trying to be seen. It is clear that ODH, and other clinics like us, cannot meet the current demand without additional staff and new providers – and we can't hire new providers without a stronger statewide talent pipeline.

Rhode Island currently lacks sufficient training opportunities for medical professionals. Most medical students that are trained in Rhode Island today leave the state once their education is complete, and those who do decide to stay rarely pursue primary care concentrations. As previously covered in an article in the Boston Globe, only one student from Brown University's most recent Medical School class stayed in Rhode Island to practice². A public medical school at URI that would focus on primary care is a vital piece of solving this supply problem by creating new pathways for future providers.

We appreciate that the Senate is taking a proactive, long-term view of resolving our state's primary care crisis with bills such as this. While there are additional steps needed to fully alleviate the public health impact the provider shortage has on Rhode Islanders, we agree that a public medical school represents a logical, crucial first step in the right direction. We fully support this proposal and strongly encourage state leaders to take additional action that would bolster the education of our healthcare workforce in the short, intermediate, and long-term. Thank you for your consideration.


Sincerely,



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Chief Executive Officer
Rhode Island Public Health Institute



Dr. Philip Chan
Chief Medical Officer
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References

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