



March 24, 2026

The Honorable Melissa A. Murray, Chair
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL S 3064 — EDUCATION — UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND (Medical School Establishment and Funding)

Chair Murray and Members of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we strongly support **S 3064**, which would appropriate **\$5,000,000 in FY2027** to the University of Rhode Island to initiate the establishment of a medical school. The bill specifies allowable start-up uses—including hiring a founding dean and senior leadership, recruiting core faculty and staff, accreditation preparation, and curriculum planning—and requires a progress report to the Governor and General Assembly by **January 1, 2028**.

United Way’s policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. Under our **Strong Families** pillar, we support policies that strengthen household stability and reduce barriers to opportunity. Timely access to primary care is foundational to stability—and Rhode Island’s current shortage indicators show that access gaps remain significant, particularly in underserved areas.

As of **December 31, 2025**, Rhode Island had **17 Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations** affecting **257,218 residents**; in those designated areas, only **74.29% of need is met**, and **22 additional primary care practitioners** are needed to remove the shortage designations. Strengthening an in-state physician pipeline is a practical long-term strategy to improve access to care and reduce pressure on higher-cost emergency settings.

Recommendations for implementation: S 3064 wisely funds the early “build” phase—leadership, accreditation planning, and institutional readiness. As this work moves forward, we encourage a clear emphasis on (1) expanding **primary care capacity**, (2) strengthening clinical training partnerships in **HPSA/underserved communities**, and (3) aligning the program with Rhode Island’s workforce needs and retention goals. We also recommend that the required **January 1, 2028** progress report be used as a clear accountability tool—documenting how funds were used, progress toward accreditation and readiness, leadership/faculty recruitment milestones, and a transparent timeline and budget for subsequent phases.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for **S 3064**. This initial investment is an important step toward building the physician pipeline Rhode Island needs to improve access to care and strengthen family stability statewide.

Sincerely,



Elijah McLean
Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island