



June 1, 2023

[submitted electronically via: Slegislation@rilegislature.gov]

The Honorable Joshua Miller  
Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
41 Talbot Manor  
Cranston, RI 02905

### **Rhode Island Senate Bill 563 – SUPPORT FOR THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE**

Dear Chair Miller, Vice Chair Valverde, Secretary Lawson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

The Rhode Island Pharmacists Association (RIPA) and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on [Senate Bill \(S\) 563](#) (Senator Melissa Murray) and encourage the committee advance original language introduced in the Senate. **The original language in S563 would authorize pharmacists to prescribe and dispense HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), which is a key component of President Biden’s National HIV/AIDS Strategy.**<sup>1</sup> In 2019, nearly 35,000 new HIV infections occurred in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> As one of the most accessible and trusted health care providers in their communities,<sup>3</sup> pharmacists have a significant role to contribute in initiating access to HIV PrEP/PEP.

Established in 1874, RIPA has a rich history and is one of the oldest state pharmacist associations in the country. RIPA unites all pharmacists of the state for professional development and advancement, elevates practice standards, advocates for pharmacy, disseminates relevant scientific and professional information, and encourages collaboration between all allied health professions toward the improvement of public health.

APhA is the largest association of pharmacists in the United States advancing the entire pharmacy profession. APhA represents pharmacists in all practice settings, including community pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care facilities, specialty pharmacies, community health centers, physician offices, ambulatory clinics, managed care organizations, hospice settings, and government facilities. Our members strive to improve medication use, advance patient care and enhance public health. In Rhode Island, with 1,140 licensed pharmacists and 1,520 pharmacy technicians, APhA represents the pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians that practice in numerous settings and provide care to many of your constituents. As the voice of pharmacy, APhA leads the profession and equips members for their role

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<sup>1</sup> The White House. 2021. National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States 2022–2025. Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> HIV.gov. U.S. Statistics. Available at: <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/data-and-trends/statistics/>

<sup>3</sup> Berenbrok LA, Tang S, Gabriel N, Guo J, Sharareh N, Patel N, Dickson S, Hernandez I, Access to Community Pharmacies: A Nation-Wide Geographic Information Systems Cross-sectional Analysis, Journal of the American Pharmacists Association (2022), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japh.2022.07.003>.

as the medication expert in team-based, patient-centered care. APhA inspires, innovates, and creates opportunities for members and pharmacists worldwide to optimize medication use and health for all.

Nearly 90% of the U.S. population lives within five miles of a community pharmacy and this high level of accessibility allows pharmacists to serve in a unique role as another point of entrance for patients to get integrated into longitudinal and acute HIV preventative services. Programs allowing pharmacists to furnish HIV PrEP/PEP have expanded across the country in the past ten years.

**As mentioned above, leveraging the current healthcare workforce, including pharmacists, is a key component of President Biden’s National HIV/AIDS Strategy.<sup>4</sup>**

“Pharmacists’ knowledge and accessibility in nearly every urban and rural community can be leveraged as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention and care strategy to expand access to care and improve population health. As trusted health care professionals, pharmacists develop a strong rapport with patients and may be the key to addressing current disparities in PrEP-prescribing patterns as well as serving as an essential liaison between patients and other members of the multidisciplinary care team. Pharmacists and community pharmacies can also be utilized to expand rapid, point-of-care HIV testing in communities. In addition, studies have shown that engaging pharmacists as key players in a care team can increase retention in care and adherence to ART and maintain viral suppression.”

Pharmacists have the authority to initiate HIV PrEP in 12 states<sup>5</sup> and HIV PEP in 14 states,<sup>6</sup> via a statewide protocol, standing order, or independent prescriptive authority. Pharmacists in these programs serve as a point of triage, established within accessible and familiar community settings, for patients to enter into the HIV preventative care system. The accessibility of pharmacists is particularly important for PEP, due to the time-sensitive nature required for the initiation of medication therapy within 72 hours (3 days) of a suspected exposure. Engagement through PEP pharmacy services also establishes a contact point for the transition from PEP to PrEP for continued high-risk patients, as recommended by the most recent guideline recommendations by the U.S. Public Health Service, allowing for a more seamless entry into the HIV preventative care system.<sup>7</sup>

For these reasons, we urge the committee to advance the originally introduced S563, which authorized pharmacists to prescribe and dispense HIV PrEP/PEP. If you have any questions or require additional information, please don’t hesitate to contact Chris Federico, PharmD, BCACP, President-Elect, RI Pharmacists Association, [info@ripharmacists.org](mailto:info@ripharmacists.org), and E. Michael Murphy, PharmD, MBA, APhA Advisor for State Government Affairs by email at [mmurphy@aphanet.org](mailto:mmurphy@aphanet.org).

Sincerely,

Chris Federico PharmD, BCACP  
President-Elect, 2022-2023

Michael Baxter  
Acting Head of Government Affairs

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<sup>4</sup> The White House. 2021. National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States 2022–2025. Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Virginia

<sup>6</sup> Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Utah, Virginia

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: US Public Health Service: Preexposure prophylaxis for the prevention of HIV infection in the United States—2021 Update: a clinical practice guideline. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/risk/prep/cdc-hiv-prep-guidelines-2021.pdf>. Published 2021.

Rhode Island Pharmacists Association

American Pharmacists Association

cc: Senator Bridget Valverde, Vice Chair  
Senator Valarie J. Lawson, Secretary  
Senator Alana DiMario  
Senator Pamela J. Lauria  
Senator Elaine J. Morgan  
Senator Linda L. Ujifusa