

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Melissa Murray  
The Honorable Pamela Luria, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Rhode Island Senate  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS FOR SENATE BILL 166 – AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONALS – PHARMACIES**

Chairperson Murray, Vice Chair Luria, and members of the committee on Health and Human Services:

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rhode Island pharmacies have taken extraordinary measures to meet the needs of essential healthcare services. From keeping doors open in the early days of the pandemic, to getting shots into arms and providing crucial testing services, the pharmacy community has played a vital role in expanding patient access to care and helping communities reopen and return to normal. We support **S 166 with an amendment to set the minimum age flu & COVID-19 vaccine administration at three (3) years of age**. An amendment like this was made to H 5427 which has been passed out of the House earlier this session. Passage of this bill with amendments will better align pharmacists' vaccine authority with federal authorizations that have allowed pharmacists to provide seasonal flu and COVID-19 immunizations since October 2020.

NCPA represents the interest of America's community pharmacists, including owners of more than 19,400 independent community pharmacies across the United States and 18 independent pharmacies in Rhode Island. These Rhode Island pharmacies filled over a million prescriptions last year, impacting on the lives of thousands of patients in your state. Over 90% of Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy,<sup>1</sup> and more than any other segment of the pharmacy industry, independent community pharmacies are often located in underserved rural and urban areas. These pharmacies are frequently the most accessible healthcare providers in many Indiana communities and are vital in the provision of immunizations, testing, and other services. This bill will not only allow pharmacies to expand their vaccination capacity but could also be an opportunity for patients without a medical home or primary care provider to be plugged in to the healthcare system and to access other services they might not otherwise receive.

With over 1,170 pharmacists practicing within Rhode Island, approval of this legislation will allow pharmacists, pharmacy personnel, and pharmacies to meet the demand for health care services and continue to be a gateway for patients to access quality care. Indiana pharmacists have been administering vaccines since October 2020, when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued guidance related to the HHS Declaration Under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act for Medical Countermeasures Against COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> NCPDP Pharmacy File, ArcGIS Census Tract File, NACDS Economics Department.

This federal guidance also authorized qualified pharmacy technicians, acting under the supervision of a qualified pharmacist, to administer Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-authorized or FDA-licensed COVID-19 vaccines to persons ages three or older and to administer FDA-authorized or FDA-licensed ACIP-recommended vaccines to persons ages three through 18 according to Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice's (ACIP's) standard immunization schedule.<sup>2</sup> In August 2021, this temporary federal authority was expanded to authorize qualified pharmacy technicians to administer seasonal influenza vaccines, under the supervision of a qualified pharmacist, to persons ages 19 and older consistent with ACIP recommendations.<sup>3</sup> The federal authority was extended at the end of last year through December 2029.

NCPA strongly supports the Rhode Island's pharmacy community in their advocacy to expand COVID-19 and flu vaccination services. **S 166 with amendments like those made to H 5427** will better align with existing federal guidelines and broaden access to patients. We appreciate the committee's attention to this important public health, and we urge approval from its members.

Sincerely,



Belawoe Akwakoku  
Associate Director, State Government Affairs  
National Community Pharmacists Association

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<sup>2</sup> Guidance for PREP Act Coverage for Qualified Pharmacy Technicians and State-Authorized Pharmacy Interns for Childhood Vaccines, COVID-19 Vaccines, and COVID-19 Testing (October 20, 2020), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/prep-act-guidance.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Eighth Amendment to Declaration Under the PREP Act for Medical Countermeasures Against COVID-19 (August 4, 2021), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-08-04/pdf/2021-16681.pdf>