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To: House Committee on Health & Human Services
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition
Date: March 16, 2022
Re: **SUPPORT H7666** – Legislation to reduce patient co-pays for specialty drugs

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a goal to protect and promote comprehensive, quality, affordable healthcare for all. The Coalition **supports House Bills 7666** because it will improve affordability for Rhode Islanders battling rare or life-threatening disease whose well-being is dependent on specialty drugs.

Steep increases in prescription drug pricing in the United States has been well documented¹. This is especially true for ‘specialty drugs’ -- defined as a prescription priced at \$670 or more per month and used to treat rare or such life-threatening conditions as HIV, multiple sclerosis, certain cancers, and hepatitis C, among others.

In a 2018 [Health Affairs Policy Brief](#) on the issue, it’s noted that “*One of the principal concerns related to the rise in direct patient cost sharing for specialty drugs is severe personal or family financial burden because of illness, a problem that has been termed ‘financial toxicity.’ Commonly reported ‘symptoms’ of financial toxicity include exhausting savings accounts, having to remortgage a home, needing to borrow money from family or friends, or seeking bankruptcy protection. Financial toxicity is associated with nonadherence to medications, and there is emerging evidence that it adversely affects quality of life and survival.*”²

While prescription drug pricing in general is a major cost-driver of healthcare in the United States needing a federal response, the **Coalition supports H7666 because it will help to mitigate the ‘affordability barrier’ and this ‘financial toxicity’ for those Rhode Islanders most at-risk by capping their out-of-pocket costs for a specialty drug** at no more than \$150 per month. This is especially important because, most specialty drugs do not have substitutes to create competition to help lower their prices, and because the choice for patients between filling an exorbitantly expensive specialty drug prescription -- or not -- is often one of survival.

We urge the Committee to support this important bill. Thank you.

Protect Our Healthcare Coalition partners include: Economic Progress Institute, Mental Health Association RI, RI NOW, RI Parent Information Network, NAACP Providence Branch, United Way of Rhode Island, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, Foster Forward, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, Oasis Wellness Center, Upstream, RI Community Food Bank, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, The Womxn Project, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), Thundermist Health Center

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¹ <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/NationalHealthAccountsHistorical>

² <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20180116.800715/full/>