

I am Lauren Bode, a pharmacist and interim executive director of the Vermont Pharmacists Association. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to address the committee today and grateful for the continued discussion of this extremely important topic.

I listened with great interest to the testimony this morning. The argument that creating a modicum of transparency and accountability will break our current system does not resonate with me. You have heard the repeated assurances of opponents of this bill that they only have the interests of Vermonters in mind. If that is true, then being transparent about what they are actually doing should not be so objectionable. The reality is that PBMs are relying on this current lack of transparency to act with impunity, including not adhering to existing regulation that was put in place to try to protect Vermonters, necessitating the strengthening of these protections.

Furthermore, we have an excellent example of a good actor in our Vermont Medicaid program that operates with transparency and fairness to patients and pharmacies. This is why years ago they moved away from operating with a PBM and instead chose a more equitable AND cost-efficient model, using a pharmacy benefits administrator instead.

You have also heard that this bill would substantially increase health care costs. The data do not support this conclusion. In places where PBM regulation legislation has passed over the period of 2015-2019, health insurance premiums increased at rates below the national average.

Much has been made about the complexity of this bill, implying that it is something that is something that needs to be delayed. I do not dispute that these are complex topics, but I do dispute is that this legislation is in any way precipitous. This bill that is before you is the result of years of careful thought and consideration by national and state-level experts. Provisions included have been upheld by the US Supreme Court twice, relies on model language carefully crafted by the professionals of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. It has been vetted by local counsel, and then reviewed by numerous state stakeholders including DFR, the Governor's Office, and the Health Care Advocate.

As you'll hear from others today, for consumers, pharmacists, business owners, the system is already broken. Not breaking...broken. There has been an independent pharmacy closure every

year I have lived in Vermont. None of them in areas that could afford to lose a trusted access point for health care, not before the pandemic and certainly not now.

I am not a pharmacy owner, nor am I a dispensing pharmacist, so I have no monetary stake in the outcome of this bill. However, as a provider in a family medicine clinic I see patients caught in this system every day. Without effective regulation, PBMs will continue to act only in their own interest not in the interests of Vermonters. With all gratitude to this committee and its Chair for doing this important work, I would ask that we continue now down this path to safeguard and expand protections for my patients, your constituents, and for all of us as Vermonters.