

Date: February 14, 2022
To: House Health Care Committee
From: Susan Ridzon, HealthFirst Executive Director
Re: Workforce Challenges Affecting Independent Practices



Dear Chair Lippert and members of the House Health Care Committee,

I appreciate your recent discussion and testimony regarding workforce challenges in health care. I am writing to raise the awareness of the committee about other aspects of the health care ecosystem that have their own unique struggles when it comes to workforce development, including independent practices.

Independent physicians are currently struggling to recruit and retain all levels of staff including physicians, advanced practice professionals such as physician assistants, nurses, front office staff, medical assistants, and practice managers. Some of this is due to the inability to offer the same level of pay, loan repayment, retention compensation and bonuses than better resourced facilities can provide. Making things even more difficult for independent practices, FQHCs and hospitals have access to grants, funds, and often much higher reimbursement levels from commercial payers than independent practices. Independent practices' only source of income is payer reimbursement and because of our practices' size most have little to no ability to negotiate for higher reimbursements despite ever increasing practice and medical expenses.

Despite our network's commitment to trying to maintain their practices, it should be noted that Vermont was recently ranked as the worst state in the nation for private physicians.^[1] Within this environment we would ask that committee and the legislature work to provide more support to this important sector of our health care system. Independent practices need equitable reimbursement with inflationary increases built-in; dedicated programs to help recruit and retain clinicians and workers who choose to work in an independent practice; and an overall recognition of the value of preserving these practices for Vermonters.

If you would like to hear about the issues impacting independent practices concerning their workforce and sustainability challenges, we would be happy to come and speak with the Committee.

Sincerely,

Susan Ridzon
Executive Director
HealthFirst

About HealthFirst

HealthFirst is Vermont's independent practice association representing 64 physician-owned primary care and specialty practices located across ten counties in Vermont. We estimate that approximately 85-90% of the independent practices in Vermont are HealthFirst members.