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## NEW RHODE ISLAND LAW TO FACILITATE AND SAFEGUARD SHARING OF PATIENT INFORMATION

PROVIDENCE, RI, September 29, 2008 – Legislation ceremonially signed into law today by Governor Donald L. Carcieri will facilitate and safeguard the sharing of patient information and make the state a national leader in the effective use of health information technology to improve care.

The Rhode Island Health Information Exchange Act of 2008 creates strong patient privacy and data security protections for information shared through **currentcare**, Rhode Island's Health Information Exchange (HIE)—a secure electronic network that, when fully implemented, will give doctors and other health care providers access to the most up-to-date health information so patients can receive the best possible care.

"We need to bring health care into the information age but, at the same time, patients must have confidence in the privacy and security of their personal health information," said Governor Carcieri. "My administration has promoted the use of electronic prescribing as an important efficiency in the health care system. A statewide health information exchange is another essential electronic advancement for improving patient care and this law will give the people of Rhode Island specific rights and assurances that their information will be protected."

Sponsored by Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Paiva Weed (D-Dist. 13, Jamestown, Newport) and House Representative Peter F. Kilmartin (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket), the Rhode Island Health Information Exchange Act of 2008 creates a set of critical patient safeguards, many of which go well beyond existing state and federal privacy and data security protections.

"The potential benefits of this law are tremendous for both patients and doctors," said Senate Majority Leader Paiva Weed. "It gives patients a way to give all of their doctors secure, authorized access to the complete set of information they need to provide the best possible treatment and care."

Baseline consumer protections in the bill include:

- Clear language that participation in the HIE is voluntary – both consumers and providers get to choose whether or not to participate
- The ability to obtain a copy of confidential health care information from the HIE
- The ability to obtain a copy of a Disclosure Report relating to access of a patient's confidential health care information through the HIE
- Notification of breach of security of the HIE consistent with the RI identity theft law
- The right to terminate participation in the HIE
- The right to request that inaccurate information provided to the HIE be corrected through a provider
- Strong data security procedures
- Oversight by the Department of Health
- The creation of an HIE Advisory Commission to make recommendations to the Department of Health regarding the use of confidential health care information in the HIE
- Civil and criminal penalties for violation of the Act

"Research shows that consumers want to use health information technology to obtain the best possible care and to better manage their family's health," said Representative Kilmartin. "This law will go a long way towards moving our health care system safely into the digital age for the benefit of all Rhode Islanders."

This new law is the result of a comprehensive and broad-based community engagement process, led by the Rhode Island Quality Institute (RIQI), which included consumers, consumer advocate organizations, physicians and other providers, insurers, hospitals, universities, employers and state officials.

"RIQI, in partnership with the state, spent nearly a year and a half engaging every interested party in the state of Rhode Island in a collaborative process designed to produce comprehensive safeguards for protecting patient rights related to health information exchange," said Laura Adams, president and CEO, RIQI. The outcome of this extensive process was a piece of legislation that truly reflected the will of the RI community as a whole."

RIQI received an official designation as the Regional Health Information Organization by the State of Rhode Island. In September 2004, the Rhode Island Department of Health was one of only six states nationally to receive a \$5 million, 5-year demonstration contract from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The contract supports a community-based effort to design and develop a statewide Health Information Exchange. The State subcontracted with RIQI to provide governance for the initiative.

"Rhode Island can be proud of having a statewide health information exchange that will help cut costs and give patients and their families piece of mind," said U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), who helped found the Quality Institute as Rhode Island's Attorney General. "In the Senate, I'm working to establish a nationwide health information technology infrastructure that will improve the coordination of care, lead to fewer medical errors, and save our health care system billions of dollars. In doing so, it is important to always protect patient privacy, and I'm happy that Rhode Island is once again leading the way on this vital issue."

There is no cost for participating in **currentcare**. Funding is provided by state and federal grants as well as major health care providers and insurers.

"Health information technology has the ability to provide doctors and patients with better information for making informed healthcare decisions," said Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, (D-RI). "In order to achieve these tremendous benefits, you must have legislation that clearly defines and protects patient rights."

Patients must enroll *before* their health information begins to be available through **currentcare** from participating data sources. Once patients enroll, their health information will start to aggregate within **currentcare**. Phase I enrollment activities are already underway.

"Thundermist is proud to be one of the first provider organizations in the state to begin enrolling patients in **currentcare**," said Maria Montanaro, president & chief executive officer, Thundermist Health Center. "Having a statewide health information exchange will help us in our delivery of high quality health care to our patients and greatly advantage the coordination of their care as they move throughout the health care delivery system in RI.

Initially, **currentcare** will include laboratory information from Lifespan, East Side Clinical Laboratory, and Department of Health laboratories, as well as medication history information from retail pharmacies. Eventually, it will include additional types of health information like radiology reports and discharge summaries. The goal is to connect all providers in the state.

The Rhode Island Health Information Exchange Act of 2008 was passed by the legislature in June and will take effect in March of 2009. For more information, go to [www.currentcareri.com](http://www.currentcareri.com) or [www.riqi.org](http://www.riqi.org).

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*The Rhode Island Quality Institute (RIQI) is a statewide collaboration of hospitals, physicians, nurses, health insurers, consumers, business, government and academia working together to significantly improve health care in Rhode Island. Founded in 2001, the RIQI's strategic focus includes building a statewide health care information exchange and interoperability and ensuring the adoption of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) as the foundation for continual improvement in the quality of care. The RIQI is leveraging RI's unique characteristics (small size, line of sight trust, and governmental accessibility) to demonstrate how the health care system can be improved through collaborative innovation. For more information, visit [www.riqi.org](http://www.riqi.org).*