

PHYSICIAN

DR. REBECCA MACDONELL-YILMAZ

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What led you to choose health care as your profession? My high school violin teacher, who was like a second mother to me, died of ovarian cancer, leaving behind two young children. I was just starting college and I remember thinking, I could walk this path with people, accompanying them on these difficult journeys no matter the outcome.

How have you helped boost the quality of or access to health care? Children have less access to palliative and hospice care than adults because there are fewer clinicians who have training and comfort in caring for them at the end of life. I advocated for and helped build Rhode Island's only dedicated pediatric-specific hospice team so kids can get developmentally appropriate end-of-life care at home, families can receive bereavement support and we can continue training health care workers to meet this need.

What is the biggest challenge you and your organization are facing this year? Staffing shortages, especially of nurses. I frequently meet families with medically complex children who are approved to receive home nursing hours but can fill only a fraction of them due to a lack of nurses – specifically those who will care for pediatric patients.

What more do you feel the state can do to help further support the health care sector in Rhode Island? To help bolster staffing, I would love to see state-based programs to pay nurses more competitively in Rhode Island, including more incentive programs such as tuition discounts and loan forgiveness. Significant discrepancies in pay in such a small geographic area are especially impactful because it is easy to cross state lines to find work with better pay. ■



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