



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Elizabeth H. Roberts  
Lieutenant Governor

April 11, 2011

Dear RIMS Members,

Last Monday, I had the privilege to speak to the Council of the Rhode Island Medical Society. The summary of my comments that evening has generated some controversy and I would like to clarify my remarks on the issue of malpractice reform. When asked about the issue of tort reform, I answered candidly that I do not think we have enough consensus among elected officials to move comprehensive tort reform forward at this time. That statement should not be interpreted to mean that I do not believe that we need reform. I was a sponsor during my time in the legislature of tort reform, working closely with the medical society on those efforts. We were not successful at that time and I do not believe that we have a consensus for common sense comprehensive tort reform, locally or nationally even now. However, I do believe that there is certainly room for incremental progress in this area with such useful measures as the “I’m sorry” legislation currently pending in the General Assembly and I will continue to support these efforts as I have in the past.

Some misinterpreted my statement that the lack of political momentum on comprehensive tort reform can be tied in part to a common belief that malpractice, although an important cost driver, accounts for less than 10% of system-wide costs. In recognizing this common belief, I in no way meant to minimize the impact of malpractice costs on many practices. I am very aware that for many physicians the cost of malpractice insurance is very significant.

I was honored to be asked to speak to RIMS on Monday. I want to emphasize that I am very aware of and concerned about the costs of malpractice insurance on practices as well as the economic burden that “defensive medicine” imposes on the entire health care system. Our success in moving our health system forward is tied to our ability to work collaboratively. I recognize that physician leadership is especially vital to a high quality and sustainable health care system. I very much look forward to continuing to work together on these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth H. Roberts  
Lieutenant Governor