



May 30, 2022

Governor Dan McKee

Office of the Governor

82 Smith Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Sometimes, the hardest part of starting a letter is starting the letter. I can think of no task more difficult in my 32 years as a physician than writing you this letter of resignation. Although I have enjoyed tremendously my 10 years at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), family circumstances require me to move out of state to be closer to extended family. I anticipate my last day of State service will be Friday, July 29, 2022.

My family life has changed significantly since we spoke about me being Interim Director in January of 2022. These changes have compelled me to spend substantial time in thought, prayer, and painful deliberation.

As you know, family is important to me. As with many Rhode Islanders, I have a family member who suffers from Alzheimer's, specifically my mom. Although you have never met my mom, I can assure you she is an amazing woman. She raised six successful sons, owned a business for over 50 years and was a vibrant community leader. At this point in her disease, she still knows who I am, and is still happy to see me and my family, yet I am not certain how long this will be the case.

My dad, the ever-faithful support during all of our lives, is challenged at age 91 to help my mom and maintain his health. It is evident to me; they need more help, help we can and should give them.

Additionally, as I reflect on my children, specifically my sons who have very different forms of autism, I see more and more the need for them to be surrounded by extended family. Autism is a complex syndrome, and in addition to the communication and socialization challenges, it can be very lonely and isolating. Extended family and the love and support they give can be a very effective therapeutic and long-term option that my sons desperately need.

Leaving the Department of Health is something I thought I would never do; it has been the highlight of my career to have served here the last 10 years. I have such profound respect for the inspiring and selfless team I have had the privilege to serve with and lead. Often, their work goes unnoticed, yet public health quietly saves lives each day. Our team is a rare combination of selfless, committed people who serve with passion, purpose, and commitment.

I recall when I first joined the Department in 2012 and then-Director Dr. Michael Fine asked me to help get control of the prescribing of opioids in the state. Little did I know, the power of collaboration while working with our team and partners, we would host dozens of continuing medical education events at venues all over the state. Subsequently, with substantial community engagement, we promulgated regulations regarding responsible prescribing in 2015. Unexpectedly to me, as this unfolded, I acquired more and more expertise and subsequently became one of the State's experts in successful litigation against opioid manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors, recovering over \$280 million for Rhode Islanders.

As an interesting turn of events, I was thrilled and humbled in 2022, when Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott asked me to chair the group to create and promulgate regulations for Harm Reduction Centers. Over 10 years, this would be enough to satisfy anyone's career, yet I have been honored to be involved with so much more, including starting our Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, instituting Just Culture in our Board of Medical Licensure and Discipline, and much more.

And this all preceded the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been an honor to get to know the people of Rhode Island over the course of the last two and a half years. The pandemic changed my life significantly, not just personally, but professionally. I never expected to be the voice of the Department, and I am glad my honest, straightforward way of communicating helped Rhode Islanders during many moments of great uncertainty and unease.

Throughout the pandemic I have experienced the best of Rhode Island. I have met so many warm welcoming people who have become stronger as we have emerged

from this common threat to our health and well-being. Rhode Island really isn't just the Ocean State, it is the Welcome State. As I reflect on the pandemic, Rhode Islanders adapted to rapid significant change, increased their personal public health literacy, and demonstrated resilience that reflects their hearty New England heritage.

Governor, I have enjoyed working with you and am sorry our time together has been cut short. You have had the unenviable role of stepping into the position of leading the State response to COVID-19 midstream. You have had to make many significant, challenging decisions, and I believe that you have acted prudently and wisely.

Governor, I am thankful you chose me for the role as Interim Director. I am also thankful for your staff. Your staff, to a person, although often unknown to the public, are good people who do great work daily. Their commitment, dedication, and sacrifice inspire me and my team at the Department of Health.

You have my cell phone number and email address. Please feel free to contact me at your pleasure after I leave State service. I am always happy to help you in any way I can.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. V. McDonald MD, MPH". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "J.V." and "MD, MPH" clearly visible.

James V. McDonald MD, MPH

Interim Director of Health