



March 2, 2021

The Honorable Representative Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Chair of the House Committee on Corporations
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5438 - Patient Assistance

Dear Chairman Solomon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to express the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island's support for House Bill 5438, which would require health insurers to count copay assistance coupons toward an enrollee's cost sharing requirements.

For the one in five adults who live with a diagnosable mental health condition¹, this protection is important. Many of us rely on prescription medications to maintain our mental health, yet even those of us with insurance often have difficulty affording the medications our providers have prescribed. For example, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island's "[Basic Blue Direct](#)" Plan requires \$50 to \$100 copay for certain medications after the deductible has been met. (Click on "Prescription Drugs" to see the copays for various tiers of drugs.) Imagine if you have to pay for two or more prescriptions each month. What if you work full-time and earn the minimum wage of \$10.50/hour, earning less than \$22,000 per year? The cost of prescription medications has increased over the years while wages have remained stagnant. Copay assistance coupons are a lifeline for many Rhode Island residents.

¹ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened our mental health. A Kaiser Family Foundation study found that 37.1% of adults in Rhode Island reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder.² Now is the right time to ensure access to mental health treatment. Please protect Rhode Islanders' access to lifesaving psychotropic medications. I respectfully encourage you to vote "yes" on this important healthcare protection.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Laurie-Marie Pisciotta
Executive Director
laurie.pisciotta@mhari.org
(401) 215-4471 cell
345 Blackstone Blvd., Sawyer Building, Room 310
Providence, RI 02906

²

[https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/rhode-island/#:~:text=Mental%20Illness%20Prevalence,-Mental%20illnesses%20can&text=These%20conditions%20include%20depression%2C%20anxiety,the%20U.S.%20share%20\(19.0%25\).](https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/rhode-island/#:~:text=Mental%20Illness%20Prevalence,-Mental%20illnesses%20can&text=These%20conditions%20include%20depression%2C%20anxiety,the%20U.S.%20share%20(19.0%25).)