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To: House Finance Sub-Committee on Human Services
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition
Date: July 30, 2020
Re: **SUPPORT Amendment to Budget Article 14 to expand the First Connections program to pregnant women**

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a goal to protect and promote quality, affordable healthcare for all. The Coalition also includes hundreds of community members around the state who support the Coalition's mission.

The Coalition supports expanding the multi-disciplinary First Connections Program to pregnant women to help improve birth outcomes for vulnerable women.

Racial discrimination and implicit bias result in unequal treatment of Black women in the medical system and drive health inequity. In Rhode Island, Black women are 42% more likely to experience a severe complication at delivery than White women. The infant mortality rate for Black Infants in Rhode Island is three times that of White infants. A key strategy to address this issue is to provide prenatal and birthing support to vulnerable populations, including through the First Connections program. The Coalition also supports the provision in Article 14, as outlined in previous testimony, to make doula services eligible for reimbursement through Medicaid.

We must do all that we can to eliminate racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality by investing in building and sustaining the workforce and infrastructure to support pre-natal women in the state, especially for communities most impacted by racial disparities. **We urge you to support the First Connections amendment** to Article 14.

Thank you.

Protect Our Healthcare Coalition partners include: Economic Progress Institute, Mental Health Association RI, RI NOW, RI Parent Information Network, RI Health Center Association, NAACP Providence Branch, United Way of Rhode Island, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, Foster Forward, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, Oasis Wellness Center, RI Community Food Bank, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), Thundermist Health Center

c/o the Economic Progress Institute, 600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Building #9, Providence, RI 02908