



February 24, 2021

The Honorable Representative Anastasia Williams
Chair of the House Labor Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5130 Regarding Raising the Minimum Wage

Dear Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee:

The Mental Health Association enthusiastically supports House Bill 5130, which is a step towards gradually increasing the minimum wage from eleven dollars and fifty cents (\$11.50) per hour to fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per hour, over 4 years. Raising the minimum wage will work towards alleviating poverty and its detrimental effects, including its impacts on mental health.

Some facts to consider:

- People who are poor are twice as likely to have common mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, compared to the rich. In fact, low-income populations are 1.5 to 2 times more likely to have depression.¹
- The populations of under-resourced communities in Rhode Island are 78% People of Color. These communities are disproportionately impacted by low economic opportunity, including low wages² in addition to being at higher risk of mental health conditions as a result of their level of poverty.³
- Children in poverty are among those with the most risk of having mental health conditions in Rhode Island.⁴
- Native American, Hispanic, Black, and Asian children in Rhode Island are all more likely to be in poverty than white children,⁵ putting them at higher risk for poverty-related mental health issues.

¹ https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/development/1_Breakingviciouscycle_Infosheet.pdf

² <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/politics/2020/11/16/providence-ranks-highly-among-u-s-cities-concentrated-poverty/6315197002/>

³ https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/development/1_Breakingviciouscycle_Infosheet.pdf

⁴ <http://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Factbook%202016/Mental%20Health%202016.pdf>

⁵ http://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Media%20Releases/9.17.20%20Media%20Release%20-%20Child%20Poverty_2019%20-%20final.pdf?ver=2020-09-18-125640-977

Increasing the minimum wage is essential to ensuring that individuals do not have to experience the conditions of poverty, including the resulting mental health issues that can occur as a result of hunger, debt, and overcrowded housing.⁶ The effects of poverty permeate all areas of life, creating housing and food insecurity and leading to reduced physical health in addition to worsening mental health.⁷ It is important to continue increasing the minimum wage to combat these circumstances and address the underlying causes of poverty as a contributor to mental health conditions in Rhode Island and across the nation.

Lack of a living wage means that individuals are forced to work an excessive number of hours each week to be able to provide shelter and food for themselves and their loved ones. This has negative impacts on mental health, as individuals working 11 hours a day are more likely to experience depression than those who work 7 to 8 hours a day.⁸ The stress of working additional hours can also cause physical ailments such as stroke, coronary artery disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer.⁹ Increasing the minimum wage will reduce the number of hours people need to work, leading to a reduction in these detrimental effects overall.

Establishing a living wage is just one step towards providing necessary support for poor and impoverished individuals to survive and thrive. It is essential to providing the educational and professional opportunities that allow for economic advancement, all the more reason why this bill is essential for the effort of reducing poverty and improving mental health outcomes for members of the Rhode Island community.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

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⁶ https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/development/1_Breakingviciouscycle_Infosheet.pdf

⁷ http://www.housingworksri.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/HWRI-SS_How%20to%20End%20Long-Term%20Homelessness_2018-Nov.pdf

⁸ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0030719>

⁹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20046037>