

January 29, 2024

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

RE: H7139 – An Act Relating to Insurance – Regulation of Pharmacy Benefit Managers

Dear Mr. Chairman and honorable Committee Members,


As the Chief Operating Officer at VICTA, an agency that provides substance use, mental health, and medical services on Elmwood Avenue I am submitting this testimony in strong support of H7139. I would like to thank Representative Lombardi and his co-sponsors for bringing this bill forward.

In the course of daily operations in an organization dedicated to saving lives and fighting the drug poisoning/overdose crisis that has affected so many Rhode Islanders, timing is everything. Delays in access to care or medication administration can mean the difference between someone beginning their recovery and going out to use unregulated drugs to manage their symptoms. Unfortunately, for long-acting medications for opioid use disorder, delays are the standard, not the exception.

To order a medication such as Sublocade (a long-acting injection form of buprenorphine), our providers and support staff must go through multiple steps to: a) identify which specialty pharmacy the Managed Care Organization subcontracts with; b) send in the prescription to that pharmacy; c) for some health plans, obtain prior authorization including documentation of failed-first medications; d) attempt to contact the patient to approve delivery, when our most vulnerable patients often do not have a phone, change numbers, are out of minutes, etc.; and e) reconnect with the pharmacy to arrange delivery in line with the client's scheduled appointment for administration.

The nature of addiction is such that clients may disengage and return to treatment multiple times, and administrative barriers to care negatively impact our ability to respond quickly to their needs. Oversight and accountability must accompany the 'management' of benefits to ensure that preventable harms are avoided and our friends and neighbors protected. I urge you to support H7139 to this end.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Peterson', with a stylized flourish above the name.

Lisa Peterson, LMHC/LCDP/LCDS/MAC