



February 8, 2024

The Honorable Representative Marvin L. Abney  
Chair of the House Finance Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support for House Bill 7200 - [The Healthcare Workforce Data Collection Act](#)** (Pages 81 to 82)

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island's support for the Healthcare Workforce Data Collection Act. Passing and funding this Act is a critically important step toward building a more inclusive, prepared, and adaptable behavioral healthcare system in Rhode Island.

Seeking behavioral health services is a courageous decision. Research shows that people are more likely to report positive experiences in treatment when they share the race, ethnicity or gender of their provider.<sup>1</sup> Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are underrepresented as mental health consumers and professionals. While the state and community partners have made great strides to diversify our behavioral healthcare system, it is difficult to track progress without data.

The Healthcare Workforce Data Collection Act addresses this challenge. It authorizes the state to update and leverage provider licensing forms to collect much needed data, such as the applicant's demographic information and spoken languages. There is great value in knowing how many providers, for example, speak American Sign Language or Spanish. If the state learns that it lacks enough clinicians who speak these languages, it can take steps to train or hire professionals who are fluent.

Additionally, the Act allows licensing forms to ask applicants if they accept Medicaid as a form of payment. This question is particularly important given that many providers do not accept Medicaid because the rates are too low. An inadequate network of providers contributes to many Rhode Islanders being placed on waitlists for services when they need help. Quantifying this problem is the first step toward remedying it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Takeshita J, Wang S, Loren AW, et al. Association of Racial/Ethnic and Gender Concordance Between Patients and Physicians With Patient Experience Ratings. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2020;3(11):e2024583. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.24583

In short, the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island believes this Act is necessary to uniformly and regularly collect important data. Data will help the state assess the supply and demand of clinicians, plan for, and build a robust and responsive system of care to serve all Rhode Islanders. Conversely, without data, the state is forced to make critical policy and funding decisions based on anecdotes, self-reporting, and projections.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Laurie-Marie Pisciotta  
Executive Director  
[laurie.pisciotta@mhari.org](mailto:laurie.pisciotta@mhari.org)  
(401) 215-4471 cell