



February 28, 2024

To: Chairman Marvin Abney
Members, House Finance Committee

Statement Re H7225
Article 9 Medical Assistance, Section 5

The Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island is a non-profit organization working to improve the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders. We appreciate Section 5 provides some funding to implement recommendations from the Health and Human Services Rate Review Study but are concerned that just one-third of the recommended funding will not significantly improve worker shortages and improve access to needed care and services.

Surveys consistently show that older persons want to remain at home and in the community when they need care. The Senior Agenda has advocated for many years to strengthen home and community supports for older adults. Home care is not only what seniors prefer; it can be less costly for state government. For example, the latest RI Annual Medicaid report shows the home and community services PMPM expenditure for older persons as \$3,497 vs. \$4,995 for nursing homes.

The homecare industry is impacted by the healthcare workforce crisis and too many persons wait to receive homecare. In mid-January the EOHHS Home Care Portal showed 177 persons waiting for a total of 4,215 hours of care with **75% of them waiting over two months!** Long wait times can lead to health declines and more expensive nursing home placement. State homecare provider reimbursements are not sufficient for providing living wages for the CNAs working in this field the majority of whom are women and many are lower-income persons of color.

The legislature wisely mandated the Office of Health Insurance (OHIC) to conduct a health and human services rate review study appropriating \$1Million for this purpose. I was part of the study's Advisory Task Force. OHIC's management of the study and the work of the consultant group which led to OHIC's recommendations was impressive. Using an Independent Review Methodology, the study found a 58% difference between the current composite fee-for-service rates and the composite comparison clearly demonstrating homecare provider rates need to be significantly increased.

The Senior Agenda appreciates that the Governor's budget includes funding to phase in one-third of OHIC's recommendations. However, this level of wage increase will not address the homecare worker shortage. Provider reimbursements must be sufficient to allow for a living wage to be paid to attract and retain homecare workers. This work is not easy – it requires providing personal care such as bathing, toileting and ambulating. I know this from working for 20 years as a hands-on nurse. These workers can go to other sectors of the economy and earn higher wages for much less demanding work. The Senior Agenda Coalition urges you to reject funding only one-third of the rate review recommendations. This limited funding will do little to impact the homecare worker shortage.

Maureen Maignet, Policy Advisor
Senior Agenda Coalition of RI