



May 1, 2024

RE: H-7204

Dear Representative Abney and Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Clare McMillan. I live in Barrington and my state senator is Pamela Lauria and my state representative is Jason Knight. I am a board certified pediatrician and fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I have been in practice at East Greenwich Pediatrics since 2003. I am also a member of the PediPRN advisory board.

I am writing to urge you to support Rhode Island's PediPRN program. Specifically, I urge you to support Senate Bill 2072 which supports sustainable funding for Psychiatry Resource Network which in turn funds RI's PediPRN and MomsPRN.

Since starting in pediatric practice 22 years ago, there has been a shift in pediatrics and the type of pediatric illness we treat as pediatricians. In the last decade my daily work has moved from about 1 in 10 visits for behavioral health concerns to about 1 in 3. In my office we screen all patients over 12 for depression at their well child visits and every day there is at least one positive screen indicating significant depression. Many days I have patients who have thoughts of suicide. Anxiety is elevated across all age groups (including parents) leading to somatic complaints like abdominal pain and headaches and school avoidance. Every week I see a kid with an eating disorder, a rare occurrence in the previous decade.

At the same time there is a shortage of child psychiatrists accepting referrals in Rhode Island, making pediatricians the first stop for families when kids are in crisis. Pediatricians have a significant advantage in caring for the behavioral health concerns of our patients as we know our families intimately and they inherently trust us, but we have needed increased support as the presenting problems have gotten more complicated.

PediPRN helps pediatricians like me in 3 ways:

1. The PediPRN Intensive Program which I completed in 2018 gave me practical training in evidence based behavioral health care. I became more confident after taking the year-long class at handling common issues such as anxiety and depression and ADHD.
2. The PediPRN consultative service provides direct psychiatrist to pediatrician consults, helping me on challenging cases. As an example, two weeks ago I used this service to get help for a teen with significant obsessive compulsive disorder who was not responding to the medications I had tried. By working with the child psychiatrist I was able to make a new plan feeling confident I was using the most evidence based treatment.
3. PediPRN provided a monthly lunch learning session with a psychologist and psychiatrist for providers in my office. Having this in place led to our practice starting an integrated behavioral health program.

There is already a shortage of primary care providers in Rhode Island. Providing support to pediatricians is a way to prevent burn out by giving us the tools we need to do our jobs well.

In the midst of this time of increased mental health care needs of pediatric patients and their parents, it is imperative to have full and sustainable funding of the PediPRN and MomsPRN programs. I strongly urge you to support S-2072 so the children of Rhode Island have access to critically and timely needed mental health care that they so desperately require.

Please pass this bill out of committee and recommend it for passage by the full State Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Clare McMillan
East Greenwich Pediatrics