

To: House Committee on Finance
From: Gofran Tarabulsi, MD
Date: May 1, 2024
Subject: **Support for HB 7204**

Chairman Abney & Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 7204, which would help sustain funding of Psychiatry Resource Network Programs, such as the RI Maternal Psychiatry Resource Network Program, in Rhode Island. **I strongly support this bill.**

Importance of Addressing Perinatal Mental Health

As a board-certified internal medicine specialist and attending physician at the Center for Obstetric and Consultative Medicine at Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island, I have long recognized the importance of addressing the mental health of my pregnant and postpartum patients. Clinical research has long shown perinatal depression and other mood disorders, such as bipolar disorder and anxiety disorders, can have devastating effects on women, infants, and families if left untreated. National studies have also shown, mental health and substance use conditions often are underdiagnosed, and engaging with care may be challenging for many reasons.

Enhancing Access and Care Thanks to Partnership with the RI MomsPRN Program

In Rhode Island, we are fortunate to have many passionate providers who understand the importance of addressing perinatal behavioral health and who utilize the real-time clinical supports of the Rhode Island Maternal Psychiatry Resource Network (RI MomsPRN) Program to proactively address the mental health needs of their perinatal patients. For the past two years, my practice has been able to closely collaborate with clinical staff of the RI MomsPRN program at the Center for Women's Behavioral Health at Women and Infants Hospital to optimize our screening, treatment, and referral workflows for depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder among our pregnant and postpartum patients. The ongoing professional education as well as real-time clinical support with diagnosis, treatment planning, medication safety, and resource/referral offered through the RI MomsPRN teleconsultation line have been immensely helpful. As a result of this partnership, we are now implementing universal mental health and substance use screening and have enhanced our ability to connect patients to needed mental healthcare in a more efficient and effective manner thanks in part to the clinical support offered by the RI MomsPRN teleconsultation line.

Support for Sustained Funding of RI MomsPRN Services

It is critically important the General Assembly support statewide services that help improve provider self-efficacy with addressing perinatal mental health and increase patient access to care for those impacted. While our state has been lucky to have localized mental health experts, there are too few and it can be difficult and time-consuming to navigate a complex behavioral health care system in light of the increasing demand for services. Having access to Psychiatry Resource Network teleconsultation lines such as RI MomsPRN has been a lifeline for busy providers, such as myself, who manage the complex needs of pregnant and postpartum patients. I urge to you to sustain these critically needed provider supports that help increase access to mental healthcare and thank you for the opportunity provide testimony.

Thank you,

Gofran Tarabulsi, MD