



**Lifespan**  
*Delivering health with care*

**Government Relations**

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**David A. Balasco, Esq.**  
Vice President

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**Representative Marvin L. Abney**  
Chairman  
House Finance  
State House  
Room 35  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

**RE: H.7204, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – The Healthcare Services Funding Plan Act.**

Dear Chairman Abney:

Lifespan, and in particular Bradley Hospital, a member of the Pediatric Psychiatry Resource Network (PediPRN) program, writes in support of H.7204. This bill would amend Rhode Island's existing Healthcare Services Funding Plan Act by adding an account to fund Rhode Island's present PediPRN and RI MomsPRN teleconsultation services for providers caring for perinatal and/or pediatric patients. The bill ensures that existing critical psychiatric resources remain available to patients. This is particularly urgent given that the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) was not awarded continued federal funding for the highly impactful RI MomsPRN program in September 2023.

**Growing Need for Mental Health Services Among Pediatric Patients**

Clinical research both nationally and locally consistently show that mental health disorders are common among youth. In Rhode Island, nearly one in four youth have a diagnosable mental health condition. Mental health concerns cut across all backgrounds, regardless of age, race, gender identity, or zip code. For developing children and adolescents, untreated mental health needs can disrupt functioning at home, school, and in the community and are increasing at an alarming rate.

**Adverse Impacts if Left Untreated**

Pediatric mental health conditions -- including depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use disorder are serious illnesses that, if left untreated, can result in negative long-term impacts on patients and their families. For example, youth mental health conditions are associated with increased household spending, caregiver disruptions at work, and youth academic disruptions. Untreated and undertreated youth mental health conditions are associated with long-term, progressive adult mental health conditions and related negative impacts on adult functioning.

**Leveraging Local Pediatric Mental Health Expertise Amidst Shortages**

Rhode Island has been fortunate to have nationally recognized mental health treatment options for pediatric patients. At Bradley Hospital, patient services include intensive outpatient and partial

hospital treatment for a wide variety of ages and conditions, outpatient services, and school and residential services.

Despite all these resources, there are still not enough specialized mental health providers with pediatric expertise as made evident by ongoing waitlists. As a result, much of the burden for initial mental healthcare falls on frontline clinicians, such as pediatric primary care providers who typically do not have extensive training in mental health and must navigate a complex and overtaxed system to connect their patients with proper mental health services, which can be difficult and time consuming.

#### **PediPRN Services Help Increase Access to Mental Healthcare**

PediPRN is a telephonic consultation and educational program that empowers pediatric primary care providers (PPCPs) to address the mental health care needs of their patients via consult with mental health specialists and participation in mental health education and training services. With this support, PediPRN improves access to and delivery of high-quality pediatric mental health services. The free service is offered to all PPCPs in Rhode Island. With access to PediPRN, PCPs can effectively treat their patients' mental health symptoms via medication management, brief targeted interventions, and other strategies. This timely intervention leads to better outcomes, including faster initiation of treatment with a familiar healthcare professional.

#### **Sustainable Funding is Needed Given a Lack of Federal Funding**

PediPRN has been tremendously successful in helping providers address the mental health needs of their pediatric patients. In addition, this service also continues to help providers increase their knowledge and competency through real-time clinical support as well as ongoing professional education opportunities, especially with respect to mild-to moderate conditions. However, reliance on competitive grant funding places the programs longevity and consistent availability in Rhode Island at risk.

The Rhode Island General Assembly has shown strong leadership and support for ensuring access to mental healthcare for all Rhode Islanders, including pediatric patients. This bill is in concert with that mission – and is another critically important piece of legislation that will help strengthen Rhode Island's mental healthcare system by preserving these vitally impactful Psychiatry Resource Network Programs. This program helps providers ensure more perinatal and pediatric patients with emerging or diagnosed mental health disorders receive timely and needed treatment. These programs also help ensure providers across the state continue to have clinical access to the state's limited specialty psychiatric workforce in an efficient and effective manner.

We appreciate the opportunity to support this bill.

Sincerely,



David A. Balasco

Vice-President, Government Relations