

March 5, 2024

Re: Testimony in Support of H7204

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

My name is Dr. John Straus. I am a pediatrician and the founding director of the Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program (MCPAP) and MCPAP for Moms. I am testifying in strong support of H7204. This legislation, forming RI PRN, will provide sustainable funding for both PediPRN and MomsPRN. I have consulted on the creation of both Rhode Island programs which are closely modelled off the work we have done in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts legislature has not only funded MCPAP for 18 years and MCPAP for Moms for 8 years but has put into statute insurer funding beginning in 2016 similar to that required by H7204.

In Massachusetts, MCPAP and MCPAP for Moms have become key components of the pediatric and perinatal health care system and, as such, sharing the cost proportionally with all insurers is very appropriate. MCPAP helps nearly 6,000 youth each year and MCPAP for Moms over 3,000 perinatal individuals. In an average year, over 80% of practices and 60% of pediatricians use MCPAP at least once demonstrating the essential nature of this service and supporting its funding through insurance similar to any other medical service.

With the increasing incidence of childhood and perinatal mental health and substance use challenges, especially during the pandemic, this is the time to solidify the funding for PediPRN and MomsPRN. The shortage of child and perinatal psychiatrists make this funding even more critical. With these programs, families are able to access behavioral health services in their primary care setting close to home with clinicians who are comfortable delivering behavioral health services because of readily available expert psychiatric consultation.

I am also president of the National Network of Child Psychiatry Access Programs (NNCPAP). NNCPAP provides technical assistance to the 46 states that now have a child psychiatry access program (CPAP). You should know that the Rhode Island CPAP, PediPRN, is nationally one of the best and offers significant help to other programs around the country. This is the opportune time to make the Rhode Island programs fully sustainable. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted by,



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