



**RHODE ISLAND
MEDICAL SOCIETY**



**RHODE ISLAND ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS**
STRONG MEDICINE FOR RHODE ISLAND

Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair
House Finance Committee
Room 35
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: 24HB-7204

SUPPORT (FOR)

May 1, 2024

Dear Chairman Abney,

The Rhode Island Medical Society would like to thank Representative Shallcross Smith for introducing H 7204, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – The Healthcare Services Funding Plan Act. 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 or pediatric patients.

Clinical research both nationally and locally consistently show that mood and anxiety disorders are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, and now maternal substance use is increasing at an alarming rate. Latest survey data of perinatal individuals conducted by the Rhode Island Department of Health in 2019 show that nearly one in three (29.4%) women report experiencing depression either immediately before, during, or after their pregnancy and among those experiencing depression during their pregnancy, 44.9% did not receive any counseling and 70.1% did not take medication. Similarly, nearly one in four (23.7%) women report substance use at any time immediately before, during, or after their pregnancy. Maternal mental health conditions are serious illnesses that if left untreated, can result in negative long-term impacts on parents, and extend to babies and entire families. Depression and anxiety disorders during pregnancy have consistently been associated with premature delivery, low birth weight, impaired mother-infant attachment, and long-term cognitive and behavioral impairments during the child's development.

Since the RI MomsPRN teleconsultation line launched in September 2019, clinical staff have fielded 2,050 encounter calls from 639 providers at 219 practices across the state. Utilizers include prenatal care providers (23.5%), adult primary care providers (11.7%), pediatric providers (4.1%), psychiatric providers (15.6%), other mental health providers (12.4%), or other community providers [e.g., doula, family visitors, social workers] (32.7%). In total, 1,771 perinatal patients have been helped because of their provider calling RI MomsPRN, with 61.6% of patients covered by public insurance, 42.5% residing in the four core cities (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket), 34.5% identifying as a person of color, and 29.1% identifying as Hispanic. RI MomsPRN clinical staff are able to help calling providers identify outpatient treatment options, obtain evaluations with perinatal specialists, provide medication consultations, and facilitate referrals to intensive treatment and substance use services.

It is critically important the General Assembly support statewide services that help improve provider 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 considering the increasing demand for services that has been exacerbated by the

COVID-19 pandemic. Having access to Psychiatry Resource Network teleconsultation lines such as RI MomsPRN has been a lifeline for busy providers and healthcare workers.

We encourage you and your committee members to act favorably on this important legislation.

Please let us know if we can provide any additional information or if you have any questions on our testimony. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Heather Smith, MD, MPH
President
Rhode Island Medical Society

Jennifer Buckley, MD
President
Rhode Island Academy of Family Physicians