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April 29, 2024

Honorable Rep Marvin Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

Please accept the Rhode Island Health Center Association's letter of **support** for **House Bill 7897**. We support the bill's goal to facilitate access for Medicaid beneficiaries to necessary psychiatric medications by eliminating prior authorization or a step therapy protocol.

Rhode Island's eight Community Health Centers provide medical, dental, and behavioral health care to over 200,000 individuals; 55% of patients are enrolled in Medicaid, and 90% are at or below 200% of the poverty level. In 2022, the health centers provided over 140,000 visits to address mental health or substance use disorder needs. Medication is an essential form of treatment for many health center patients, particularly those with a serious mental illness (SMI) such as schizophrenia. The practice of step-therapy and preauthorization can challenge the ability of medical and behavioral health care providers to treat SMI patients effectively, resulting in needless patient suffering and increased emergency room use.

Reforming the Rhode Island medical assistance program to address medication barriers will help providers to appropriately treat patients and ultimately help to reduce significant human and economic costs.

Thank you.

Elena S. Nicolella

Elena Nicolella
President & CEO
Rhode Island Health Center Association

The Rhode Island Health Center Association is proud to support:
Blackstone Valley Community Health Care Inc. ~Comprehensive Community Action Program
East Bay Community Action Program ~ Providence Community Health Centers
Thundermist Health Center ~ Tri-County Community Action Agency
WellOne Primary Medical and Dental Care ~ Wood River Health