



## **Testimony in Support of H-5461: HEALTH CARE SERVICES FUNDING PLAN ACT**

April 28, 2025

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

In 2022, a workgroup of child psychiatrists and pediatricians released a declaration of a state of emergency in children's mental health in Rhode Island. As much as we might wish otherwise, children in our state continue to struggle to access critical mental health care and on behalf of the Rhode Island Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, I am now writing to you in strong support of House Bill H-5461, which would provide sustainable funding for our two psychiatric phone consultation services for children and pregnant and post-partum mothers.

Given the extensive need for behavioral health services and the extreme shortage of available specialists, it is crucial that our primary care providers have the resources to support their patients and families. The PediPRN and RI MomsPRN programs allow primary care providers to reach out by telephone to connect immediately with child psychiatrists and psychiatrists specializing in perinatal treatment. Most of the time, consultation leads to the primary care providers continuing to manage the clinical needs of their patients in their offices. When necessary, specialty consultation and follow-up is available for those patients who need it most. Not only are patients able to receive care in a familiar setting, but primary care providers are learning new skills and strategies for providing enhanced behavioral health care. In addition, a formal "PediPRN Intensive Program" has been offered to provide teaching in children's behavioral health to pediatricians.

PediPRN, which is run through Bradley Hospital, was founded in 2017 and funded by a 5-year Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health and with additional support by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of RI. This current bill would require the state to fund a Rhode Island Psychiatry Resource Network, "PRN account," as approved by a PRN advisory committee, for the purpose of equitably determining and collecting assessments for the cost of psychiatry resource networks in the state which are not covered by other federal or state funding. Rhode Island already has similar successful models in place for our universal immunization and children with special health needs programs.

According to the **Rhode Island Kids Count's 2024 Factbook**, the following were true 2022-2023:

- In Rhode Island in 2022, more than half (59%) of children ages three to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care
- In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023, 25% (32,597) of children under age 19 enrolled in Medicaid/RIte Care had a mental health diagnosis
- In SFY 2023, 959 children under age 19 enrolled in Medicaid/RIte Care were hospitalized due to a mental health related condition (down from 1,096 in SFY 2021), and 2,598 children had a mental health related emergency department visit (up from 2,246 in SFY 2021)
- In 2022, 3,265 emergency department visits took place for children with a primary mental health diagnosis
- In 2022, children were hospitalized 2,271 times for a primary mental health diagnosis

And in fiscal year 2023, there were 7921 calls to KidsLink RI, an emergency phone crisis service for families.

Meanwhile, our primary care providers remain the steadfast first line for children and families seeking crisis, acute, and chronic treatment for depression, anxiety, ADHD, eating disorders, self-injurious behaviors, suicidal behavior and attempts, aggression, developmental disabilities, and more. They are experts in caring for children but often need additional guidance and training to provide specialized behavioral health care. PediPRN allows them to do this with confidence and safe back-up when needed.

Our colleagues across Rhode Island are working harder and more collaboratively than ever to make sure our children and families are healthy, physically and emotionally, in the face of significant hardship and increased stressors. Sustainable funding for the Psychiatry Resource Network programs will provide additional support and resources to all of us as we continue to do this work. We sincerely and respectfully urge you to take this step on behalf of us healthcare providers for children, but especially on behalf of the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders, our children.

Thank you very much for your consideration and your support of H5461 HEALTHCARE SERVICES FUNDING PLAN ACT.

Sincerely,

Daisy Bassen, MD DFAACAP, (President) on behalf of the RI Council for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry