



## Washington County Coalition for Children

To: Chair Marvin Abney and the House Finance Committee

Date: April 30, 2025

RE: Support for H5461- Establishing the Psychiatry Resource Network Account

On behalf of the Washington County Coalition, I write in strong support of House Bill H5461, which amends the Healthcare Services Funding Plan Act to establish and fund a Psychiatry Resource Network (PRN) Account. This legislation represents a vital investment in Rhode Island's behavioral health system, especially for children and families in underserved areas like Washington County.

H5461 strengthens our state's commitment to early intervention, prevention, and behavioral health equity by securing sustainable funding for essential programs like PediPRN, MomsPRN, and future initiatives that support both patients and providers. These programs have been instrumental in reducing avoidable emergency department visits, supporting overburdened primary care providers, and most importantly, ensuring timely access to psychiatric expertise.

As a Coalition dedicated to promoting child well-being in Washington County, one of Rhode Island's designated mental health shortage areas, families in our community feel the devastating toll of unmet mental health needs. Too often, families are left waiting for help that never comes, and providers are forced to navigate complex mental health challenges without the tools or support they need.

1 in 5 children aged 6 to 17 has a diagnosable mental health condition, but many go untreated, particularly in more rural communities like ours. Programs like PediPRN and MomsPRN are lifelines that offer real-time psychiatric consultation and referral pathways that prevent crises, reduce delays in care, and enable primary care providers and schools to play a stronger role in early detection and intervention.

In 2022, youth emergency department visits for mental health issues spiked dramatically, fueled by the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation, grief, and economic stress. Despite the rising demand, providers in our region continue to report significant barriers to timely psychiatric support, barriers that this bill directly addresses.

**We urge you to pass H5461.** By funding the Psychiatry Resource Network, you are sustaining important services that work and are making a vital investment in the mental health of Rhode Island's children & families.

Sincerely,

Robert Hicks

## Volunteer Lobbyist

*The Washington County Coalition for Children is a coalition of area health and social service providers as well as community members working together to fill in gaps in services and support children and families in Washington County.*