

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HOUSE BILLS 6020 and 5405

To Chairman Abney and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bills 6020 and 5405.

My name is Dr. Susan Killenberg. I am a resident of Little Compton and a volunteer with the Policy and Advocacy committee for the Women's Fund of Rhode Island. Professionally, I work as a psychiatrist at the Rhode Island office of Disability Determination Services. When people inquire about my job, they frequently ask me if I see a lot of people applying for disability who are "faking it." My answer is a definitive no!

It is true that many who apply for disability do not meet the federal guidelines set by the Social Security Administration to be granted disability benefits. However, these applicants are not "faking" how overwhelmed, anxious or depressed they feel when confronted on a regular basis by mental health challenges and structural barriers that prevent them from being successful in the workplace.

What do I mean by structural barriers? I am talking about baseline levels of depression, PTSD and anxiety, that are compounded by lack of affordable housing, lack of access to job training, lack of access to medical care, lack of affordable childcare, or -for today's hearing - lack of access to dependable transportation.

These structural barriers are obstacles to workplace success and disproportionately impact women and our most vulnerable populations. It is not difficult to imagine how missing out on job opportunities or getting fired due to lack of transportation can lead someone to feel helpless and demoralized.

Each day, as I read applications for disability, I see how a lack of access to dependable transportation hinders a person's ability to get and successfully maintain a job. I cannot emphasize enough to you that RIPTA is an essential service here in RI that allows many to further their education, attend job trainings and hold a job.

When I hear about a \$36 million deficit in the RIPTA budget - a budget deficit that will surely result in significant cuts to existing RIPTA services, my first thought is for those who need a safe, predictable and reliable means to get to work each day.

For the sake of building our economy and strengthening our employment sector in RI, I urge to to vote if favor of the above mentioned bills in order to adequately fund RIPTA.

Respectfully,

Susan Killenberg, M.D