



Organization: Rhode Island Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Bill: HB 6254

Position: For/Support

Chair Abney, Vice Chairs Slater and Marszalkowski, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Rhode Island Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (RIAND) thanks you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of House Bill 6254, which authorizes a pathway to coverage for comprehensive obesity care. RIAND represents more than 500 credentialed Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) dedicated to advancing the health of Rhode Islanders through food and nutrition.

Like much of the nation, Rhode Island is facing an obesity epidemic. Nearly 300,000 adults, or approximately 32 percent of the state's adult population, are living with obesity.<sup>1</sup> The health and economic impacts are significant, with obesity-related complications costing the state an estimated \$96 million annually.<sup>2</sup>

Obesity increases the risk for numerous serious health conditions, including high blood pressure and high cholesterol, both of which are major contributors to heart disease, as well as type 2 diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea, and osteoarthritis.<sup>3</sup> These conditions can significantly reduce quality of life and contribute to higher healthcare costs.

House Bill 6254 recognizes obesity as a complex, chronic disease that requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach. The bill supports a continuum of care that includes nutrition counseling, intensive behavioral therapy (IBT), FDA-approved anti-obesity medications, and bariatric surgery. Each intervention plays a distinct yet complementary role in effective treatment.

We especially wish to highlight that nutrition counseling, when delivered as part of medical nutrition therapy (MNT) by RDNs, is a cost-effective cornerstone of obesity care. MNT

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, September 12). Adult obesity prevalence maps. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data-and-statistics/adult-obesity-prevalence-maps.html>

<sup>2</sup> GlobalData Plc. (2023). Obesity's impact on Rhode Island's economy and labor force. <https://www.globaldata.com/health-economics/US/RhodeIsland/Obesity-Impact-on-RhodeIsland-Factsheet.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, July 15). Consequences of obesity. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/basics/consequences.html>



involves a detailed nutrition assessment of a patient's medical history, lab values, medications, and lifestyle to develop a personalized nutrition plan. This intervention contributes to measurable improvements in body mass index, blood pressure, cholesterol, and waist circumference, and enhances the impact of other treatment modalities.<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9</sup>

By aligning these evidence-based strategies, House Bill 6254 supports coordinated, patient-centered care that promotes better long-term health outcomes for those with obesity.

On behalf of the Rhode Island Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report for House Bill 6254.

Sincerely,

*Julia E Berman, RD LDN*

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Resident of Warwick, RI - District 19,  
President, Rhode Island Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics

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<sup>4</sup> Sikand G, Handu D, Rozga M, de Waal D, Wong ND. Medical Nutrition Therapy Provided by Dietitians is Effective and Saves Healthcare Costs in the Management of Adults with Dyslipidemia. *Curr Atheroscler Rep*. 2023 Jun;25(6):331-342. doi: 10.1007/s11883-023-01096-0. Epub 2023 May 11.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan-Bathke M, Baxter SD, Halliday TM, et al. Weight Management Interventions Provided by a Dietitian for Adults with Overweight or Obesity: An Evidence Analysis Center Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2023;123(11):1621- 1661.e1625.

<sup>6</sup> Hartmann-Boyce J, Theodoulou A, Oke JL, et al. Long-Term Effect of Weight Regain Following Behavioral Weight Management Programs on Cardiometabolic Disease Incidence and Risk: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Circ Cardiovasc Qual Outcomes*. 2023;16(4):e009348.

<sup>7</sup> Parrott J, Frank L, Rabena R, Craggs-Dino L, Isom KA, Greiman L. American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Integrated Health Nutritional Guidelines for the Surgical Weight Loss Patient 2016 Update: Micronutrients. *Surg Obes Relat Dis*. 2017 May;13(5):727-741. doi: 10.1016/j.soard.2016.12.018. Epub 2017 Jan 19. PMID: 28392254.

<sup>8</sup> Evert AB, Dennison M, Gardner CD, Garvey WT, Lau KHK, MacLeod J, Mitri J, Pereira RF, Rawlings K, Robinson S, Saslow L, Uelmen S, Urbanski PB, Yancy WS Jr. Nutrition Therapy for Adults With Diabetes or Prediabetes: A Consensus Report. *Diabetes Care*. 2019 May;42(5):731-754. doi: 10.2337/dci19-0014. Epub 2019 Apr 18.

<sup>9</sup> Academy Quality Management Committee. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Revised 2017 Standards of Practice in Nutrition Care and Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2018 Jan;118(1):132-140.e15. doi: 10.1016/j.jand.2017.10.003. Epub 2017 Nov 22.