



Dear Finance Committee Members:

My name is Elise Laorenza, I reside in Barrington, and I am a Developmental Psychologist who has an outpatient mental health office, also located in Barrington. I am writing asking for your support for House Bill H6277, which clarifies the Wavemaker program's eligibility to support full time outpatient healthcare providers, which as written, the current legislation excludes licensed outpatient healthcare providers.

In 2023, I applied for and was accepted into the Wavemaker program after a thorough application process conducted by the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation. In 2024, I completed my first year of eligibility where my outpatient office prioritized RI Medicaid clients and families. In December 2024, I was sent a formal letter from the RI Commerce Corporation indicating that I met the several program and document requirements and that I would be reimbursed within a few weeks. Then in February 2025, I learned from RI's Taxation Department that I was not eligible for this program given I operate as an outpatient practice. I learned from Taxation that to receive the Wavemaker reimbursement, I would need a W2, a form that outpatient healthcare offices typically do not have as we pay our RI taxes in advance as Limited Liability Company or Sole Proprietorships.

While the first cohort of healthcare Wavemaker recipients denied this promised support may be less than 20 providers, each of our offices serves several hundred Rhode Islanders on Medicaid, and therefore this group of healthcare providers has substantial state level impacts for Rhode Island residents' access to care¹. In RI there are currently an estimated 370k families enrolled in Medicaid². A search of RI outpatient licensed mental health providers who accept Medicaid results in 270 providers and only 74 of those are licensed to work with children in an outpatient office³. I am one of these 74 providers in the state.

¹ The RI Commerce Corporation has indicated this number to Constituent Services; however, this organization has not communicated this publicly or to the Wavemaker group.

² Reported in June 2024 by KFF (<https://www.kff.org/statedata/election-state-fact-sheets/rhode-island/>), and RI Current (<https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2024/07/25/r-i-releases-updated-medicaid-enrollment-figures-after-completing-renewal-process/>).

³ RIDOH does not separate outpatient mental health providers with center based providers. These data were compiled by an average search across public outpatient provider databases filtered by license, Medicaid acceptance, and children/adolescent expertise (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>, and <https://zencare.co/us/rhode-island/therapists>).

This is contrasted to MA where there are double the number of licensed outpatient providers per child⁴; however, our Medicaid families are not eligible to access care outside RI, so they remain on waitlists for a RI provider while the risks of hospitalization increase substantially every day. In MA not only are the insurance reimbursement rates higher but healthcare providers are also reimbursed for coordinating care, calls with pediatricians and school staff, comprehensive assessments, and crisis intervention, services our children need from outpatient providers to prevent hospitalizations⁵. In RI, outpatient healthcare providers do not get reimbursed for these services, we are expected to provide these services out of our own time and resources. Hence, the value of the Wavemaker program to include outpatient healthcare providers.

At my practice, where we prioritize RI Medicaid families, this translates to a \$30K income loss per clinician per year to remain here, in RI. I recognize that being on the finance committee, you might see that this is a bad business model. Thankfully, I don't always view my outpatient practice as a business, but a community. I also viewed the Wavemaker program as part of this community and the State's commitment to supporting outpatient providers who remain in RI despite the financial burdens.

I was discouraged to learn that I would be denied the Wavemaker reimbursement at the final stage despite the RI Commerce Corporation's several award letters and documented commitments to me. Yet, even more frustrating was that this denial was not about budgets, but about the literal words written in the legislation. I am thankful that my representative, Rep Boylan, was willing to rectify this with the current Bill to clarify the Wavemaker program as it was intended to serve all RI healthcare providers, not just those with W2s..

I am asking you to approve this "no cost to the budget" language legislative change for licensed outpatient healthcare providers to be included, rather than excluded from the Wavemaker program. Without RI outpatient healthcare providers, our Medicaid families are forced to use hospitalization to access routine healthcare. This clarification in wording has the potential to continually increase the number of RI's outpatient healthcare providers each year to serve our 370K Medicaid families and reduce hospitalizations for RI children and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration to support outpatient healthcare providers in RI.

Sincerely,



Dr. Elise Arruda Laorenza, LMHC
Developmental Psychologist and Owner
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⁴ Mass Health Live

(<https://www.masslive.com/living/2024/03/massachusetts-ranks-in-top-us-states-for-health-and-happiness-study-says.html#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20that%20Massachusetts,provider%20for%20every%20161%20resident s.>)

⁵ Mass Gov <https://www.mass.gov/lists/provider-payment-rates-community-health-care-providers-ambulatory-care>