



Washington County Coalition for Children

To: Chair Marvin Abney and the House Finance Committee

Date: March 24, 2025

RE: Opposition to FY27 DOH budget-because there are no funds for PediPRN or state home visiting match

On behalf of the Washington County Coalition, I write in **strong opposition** to Governor McKee's FY27 Budget for the RI Dept. of Health (DOH). An unbelievable oversight by the Governor's office, this budget excludes vital investments in the **Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program** for vulnerable families and **PediPRN** (Pediatric Psychiatry Resource Network) the state's psychiatric consultation service for primary care providers. These programs not only provide essential prevention, early intervention, and behavioral health triage/service linkages for children & families, but are proven effective.

It defies logic that these important programs for children would be purposely left out of next year's budget. By failing to provide the \$535,000 in state matching funds, RI is one of only a handful of states who have chosen not to draw down \$1.6 Million in matching funds to support the program & expand access to MIECHV supports for RI families. Certainly, not a smart financial decision on the part of our state given what we know about the importance of early brain development and early relationships in children's lives to their future success in school and life. In rural/suburban areas like ours with few other resources available, MIECHV-funded home visiting programs provide indispensable supports and parent education to families with young children. This relatively small investment in MIECHV-funded programs has long-term payoffs in better child health and school outcomes for children and is worthy of state investment.

PediPRN is a lifeline for overburdened pediatric primary care providers on the frontlines of our state's youth behavioral health crisis. This program has been instrumental in reducing avoidable emergency department visits and more importantly, ensuring timely access to psychiatric expertise. Recognized as a mental health shortage area, families in Washington County feel the devastating toll of unmet mental health needs. Without PediPRN, families will be once again left waiting for help that never comes, and pediatric primary care providers will be forced to navigate complex mental health challenges without the tools or support they need. Washington County Pediatric providers rely on PediPRN to help children in crisis. All but 1 state in the United States have similar children's psychiatric consultation services in place. With 1 in 5 children with a significant mental health condition, do we really want to move that far backwards?

We urge you to **reject the current DOH budget** as presented and **insist the budget include funding for the MIECHV state match and PediPRN.**

Sincerely,

Robert Hicks
Volunteer Lobbyist