



Testimony Re: H-8175, Medicaid coverage for
Certified Lactation Counselors
House Finance Committee
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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Representative Stewart's bill, H-8175, which would require Medicaid to cover licensed certified lactation counselor services for childbearing families.

Breastfeeding (or chest feeding) and human milk are the normative standards for infant feeding and nutrition. [Breastmilk provides both short- and long-term advantages and health benefits for infants and breastfeeding parents.](#)

Breastfeeding is associated with [a lower risk](#) of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), asthma, ear infections, childhood and adult obesity, infant mortality, and diabetes. For pre-term infants, human milk reduces the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), which can be severe and life-threatening. It is also associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancer, and hypertension for the lactating parent. Breastfeeding also provides significant social and economic benefits, including reduced costs to families, reduced health care costs, and reduced employee absenteeism.

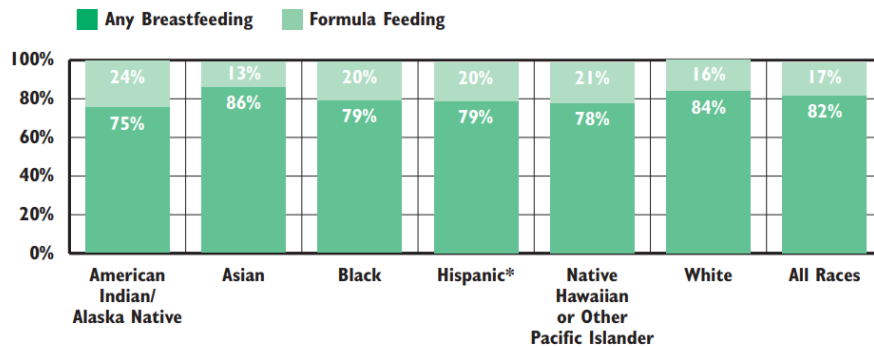
The [American Association of Pediatrics recommends](#) exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months, and breastfeeding with complementary foods for two years or longer, as mutually desired by parent and child. Although nearly 80% of families in Rhode Island intend to breastfeed their baby when they are discharged from the hospital after birth, less than one quarter of infants in Rhode Island are exclusively breastfed for at least 6 months, and only one third of babies are breastfed at 12 months.

Despite the many benefits, breastfeeding does not happen easily for all families. Difficulty with latching the baby, concerns about milk supply, and lack of knowledge about infant feeding behaviors can make establishing and maintaining a positive, successful breastfeeding relationship difficult. Licensed

Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs) can provide safe, evidence-based counseling for pregnant, lactating, and breastfeeding families. They can assess breastfeeding and milk transfer, link families to programs and resources in the community, and help families achieve their breastfeeding and lactation goals. Despite the known benefits of CLCs' services, some families are unable to access the services of licensed CLCs because Medicaid does not cover these providers. Additionally, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander infants are less likely to be breastfed than white and Asian infants, due to structural, interpersonal, cultural, and historical barriers that Women of Color face.



Breastfeeding and Formula Feeding at Birth by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2020-2024



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health [RIDOH]. (2025). *KIDSNET, 2020-2024*. Center for Health Data and Analysis. Breastfeeding and formula feeding are defined as intended feeding method at hospital discharge. *Hispanic infants can be of any race. Totals may not sum to 100% because data on feeding methods were not available for all births.

In Rhode Island between 2021 and 2023, while 70% of infants of mothers with private insurance during the postpartum period were breastfed for at least three months, only 54% of infants of mothers with Medicaid or Rite Care were breastfed for at least three months. The disparities in breastfeeding rates between mothers with private insurance and Medicaid are clear, and this is one way to work towards equitable breastfeeding support for all Rhode Island parents.

House Bill 8175 would expand access to these knowledgeable and skilled providers for Rhode Island families with Medicaid, enabling them to navigate their breastfeeding and lactation experiences with the support of a trained provider. We urge passage of this bill to increase Rhode Island families' access to breastfeeding professionals and improve the health of Rhode Island children and families with Medicaid.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.