

12 May 2026

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

I, Dannie Ritchie, MD, MPH, write to recommend the passage House Bill 8211 – Joint Resolution Making an Appropriation of \$10,000,000 to the Rhode Island Department of Health Community Health Worker Initiative.

I have worked to promote the Community Health Worker (CHW) since 2004 then through the Transcultural Community Health Initiative (TCHI). I have also been a member of the American Public Health Association's (APHA) CHW Section since 2004. In 2007, TCHI spearheaded the Commission on Health Advocacy and Equity. The law was passed in 2011 and it asks for the diversification of the health workforce as a means to promote equity and reduce disparities. One such workforce identified in the law was that of the CHW. To diversify and promote the workforce it needs financial support.

The APHA's CHW Section developed the following definition of the CHW profession, which was codified through APHA policy in 2009

A community health worker is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the worker to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

A community health worker also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support and advocacy.

The work of CHWs goes to support the community level of health, the social determinants of health, which have greater bearing on our health than health care. But CHWs are also there to assist the community in navigating the healthcare system as well as other social needs.

If we want a healthier Rhode Island, we must foster more connection and the capacity to assist the community to access its social and healthcare needs. This will be done with bolstering the CHW profession.

To end, I enthusiastically support House Bill 8211

Most sincerely,



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