

Subject: Testimony in Support of Bill H8211 – Rhode Island Community Health Worker Initiative

Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Dr. Evylegna Rodríguez and I am the Executive Director of Centro de Innovación Salud y Bienestar (CISB). Through this testimony, I respectfully express my strong support for Bill H8211, which would authorize a \$10,000,000 appropriation for the Rhode Island Department of Health Community Health Worker Initiative.

Community Health Workers (CHWs) play a critical role in addressing some of the most urgent public health disparities affecting Rhode Island communities, particularly underserved, low-income, minority, and linguistically isolated populations. Their work extends far beyond community outreach. CHWs help bridge the gap between healthcare systems and vulnerable communities by improving access to services, increasing health education, supporting chronic disease management, reducing barriers to care, and strengthening trust between residents and healthcare providers.

In many Rhode Island communities, especially within Hispanic and culturally diverse populations, Community Health Workers are often the first trusted point of contact for individuals facing mental health concerns, substance use disorders, housing instability, food insecurity, chronic illnesses, and difficulties accessing preventive services. Their cultural and linguistic competence allows them to effectively reach populations that are frequently underserved by traditional systems.

Investing in the Community Health Worker workforce is not only an investment in public health, but also a cost-effective strategy for the healthcare system. Numerous studies continue to demonstrate that CHWs help reduce unnecessary emergency room utilization, improve health outcomes, increase participation in preventive care, and strengthen long-term management of chronic conditions. Strengthening this workforce directly supports Rhode Island's goals related to health equity, prevention, and community-based care.

For the past 16 years, I have had the honor of leading a Psychosocial Center that also provides Community Health Worker services, which has allowed me to witness firsthand the real and transformative impact these professionals have on the most vulnerable communities in our state. In addition, we also lead the National Hispanic Community Health Worker Network, through which we have developed and led several national-level analyses regarding the impact and benefits Community Health Workers bring to healthcare systems. These analyses continue to demonstrate how CHWs significantly improve access to services, strengthen prevention efforts, reduce costs associated with emergency interventions, and increase the effectiveness of public health initiatives in historically underserved communities.

Through our daily work, we have witnessed how CHWs successfully connect individuals and families with essential services, reduce cultural and linguistic barriers, strengthen health education, and provide human support to populations that often feel excluded from traditional systems.

This appropriation would help expand sustainable infrastructure, workforce development and training opportunities, as well as access to community-based services throughout the state. At a time when Rhode Island continues to face growing behavioral health challenges, health disparities, and workforce shortages, supporting Community Health Workers is both necessary and urgent.

I would be honored to welcome members of the committee to our facilities so they may witness firsthand the work we do every day and the tangible impact Community Health Workers have within our communities.

**For these reasons, I respectfully urge the House Finance Committee to support and approve Bill H8211.**

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**

Sincerely,

Dr. Evylegna Rodríguez  
Executive Director  
Centro de Innovación Salud y Bienestar (CISB)