

May 12, 2026

Representative Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

H 8211 – Joint Resolution Making an Appropriation of \$10,000,000 to the Rhode Island Department of Health Community Health Worker Initiative

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

Jessica Williams from the Bristol HEZ is writing today to express our enthusiastic and unwavering support for H8211, which seeks to provide a \$10,000,000 appropriation to the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) CHW Initiative. We are thankful for Representative Kislak's tireless advocacy for CHWs in Rhode Island. This legislation represents a vital investment in Rhode Island's public health infrastructure and a direct commitment to the workforce that serves as the bridge between our systems of care, and our most vulnerable communities.

The American Public Health Association (APHA) and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) define Community Health Worker (CHW) as a frontline public health professional who is a trusted member of, or has an unusually close understanding of, the community they serve. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to serve as a liaison, link, or intermediary between health and social services and the community, facilitating access to services and improving the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

Across at least 534 published studies, CHWs have repeatedly proven to be effective at improving health outcomes and reducing healthcare costs across a variety of settings. According to the National Association of State Health Policy (NASHP) and ASTHO, they are essential for advancing health equity, as they address the social determinants of health (such as housing, food insecurity, and transportation) that often occur outside the walls of a doctor's office. By providing culturally appropriate health education, system navigation, and advocacy, CHWs empower individuals to take charge of their own health, ensuring the healthcare system is more responsive to the community's actual needs.

We applaud and support H 8211 because it provides the necessary state investment to sustain and expand a workforce that has proven essential to health equity and community resilience.

Our Support for H 8211 is grounded in several key factors:

- **Medicaid Billing is Broken:** We appreciate that this appropriation offers a grant-based funding model and will allow smaller, community-focused organizations that may not have the capacity to bill for insurance to remain active participants in the public health landscape. Medicaid billing has become unavailable for nearly all Alliance members due to a series of restrictive rule changes implemented by the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) throughout 2025. These rule changes have proven so restrictive that we are not aware of a single established clinical or CBO provider who has been able to continue participating in the program.
- **Sustainability Beyond Federal Grants:** Much of our current CHW infrastructure was established through the 2021 CDC COVID-19 response grant. As these federal funds sunset, H 8211 ensures that the state does not lose this vital workforce. This appropriation provides the stability needed to keep trained CHWs in the field.
- **Expansion into Community Hubs:** We strongly endorse the program's goal to place CHWs in libraries and other community-based organizations. These locations serve as trusted anchors where residents can access health-system navigation and facilitate coordination of care in collaboration with clinical and community partners.
- **Support for Employer Infrastructure:** We specifically support the provision to fund anchor CBOs to hire, employ, and supervise CHWs. Effective supervision is critical to the CHW model; by funding the organizations that employ them, this bill ensures CHWs have the infrastructure necessary to fulfill the scope of their work.
- **Workforce Development and Leadership:** The resolution's commitment to developing the CHW workforce and creating leadership opportunities aligns perfectly with our mission to professionalize and elevate this sector.

We support including funding for program evaluation, and capturing the return on investment for CHW placement in non-clinical settings will be vital for securing long-term, permanent funding in future budget cycles.

Thank you again for your leadership in recognizing that CHWs are a cornerstone of a resilient Rhode Island. We look forward to continuing our dialogue and supporting the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Jessica Williams

Bristol HEZ