



Dear Chair and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Naiommy Baret, and I am a proud parent advocate with Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE). I am writing in support of **House Bill No. 8268** and the continued investment in the PediPRN consultation program, which helps pediatric health care providers meet the mental health needs of young children and families.

This issue is deeply personal to me.

I am the parent of a child with complex health care needs. When my child was around 1 year old, he was diagnosed with seizures. During that time, our family was also navigating significant social-emotional and behavioral challenges. At first, I did not fully understand that many of the behaviors we were seeing were connected to his medical condition and the ways seizures can impact a child's emotional regulation, development, and behavior.

As a parent, it was overwhelming. I was trying to understand what was happening with my child, how to support him, and where to turn for help.

At that time, programs like PediPRN were not readily available to families like mine. Looking back, I know how much it would have helped if our pediatric providers had access to mental health consultation and specialized support to better understand what my child and our family were experiencing.

What made a life-changing difference for us was my Early Intervention coordinator, who was also an early childhood mental health counselor. She helped me understand something I had never heard before — that babies and toddlers can experience mental health and social-emotional challenges too. Before meeting her, I thought mental health support was only for older children or adults.

Her support changed everything. She helped me see beyond the behaviors and understand that my child was communicating distress, frustration, and unmet needs in the only ways he could at that age. That understanding changed how I parented, advocated, and partnered with providers.

So many families do not know that young children can experience mental health challenges. Many parents are navigating developmental concerns, trauma, medical complexities, emotional dysregulation, or behavioral struggles without the right support or guidance. At the same time, many pediatric providers want to help families but need access to specialists and consultation to respond effectively.

Programs like PediPRN strengthen the connection between pediatric care, mental health, and early childhood development. At a time when Rhode Island and our nation continue to face major shortages in psychiatrists, pediatric mental health providers, and pediatricians themselves, our pediatric care teams are increasingly being asked to respond to the mental health and emotional wellbeing needs of our youngest children.

Families should not have to fight for what should be a fundamental right: for our children to grow, thrive, and become healthy adults with the support they need from the very beginning of life.



We know that when children receive support early, we can reduce more serious challenges later in life. Early identification and intervention improve outcomes for children and families while reducing costly emergency crises, hospitalizations, and long-term system involvement.

Programs like PediPRN equip pediatric providers with access to specialized consultation, guidance, and expertise in infant and early childhood mental health. This allows providers to recognize social-emotional and developmental concerns early — often during the first moments families raise concerns in a pediatric office — and connect children and families to appropriate supports before challenges escalate.

For many families, pediatricians are the first and sometimes only professionals they regularly see during the early years of a child’s life. Supporting pediatric teams with programs like PediPRN strengthens the entire system of care around children and families.

Our little ones deserve access to mental health support early, not only once they are already in crisis.

As a parent and advocate, I believe no family should have to “accidentally” meet the right provider to learn that early childhood mental health support exists. Families deserve systems where pediatricians, mental health professionals, Early Intervention providers, and community supports work together from the beginning.

Investing in PediPRN is an investment in prevention, family wellbeing, and healthy child development. It helps parents feel less alone, equips providers with the tools they need, and ensures children receive support during the most critical years of brain development.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to Rhode Island’s children and families. I respectfully urge you to support House Bill No. 8268 and sustain the PediPRN consultation program.

In Community,

**Naiommy Baret**

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Providence, Rhode Island