

March 19, 2024

The Honorable Representative Susan Donovan
Chair of the House Health and Human Services committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bills # 7876, 7624, and 7874

Dear Chairwomen Donovan and Members of the House Health & Human Services Committee:

I am Gerald Tarnoff, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, who has lived in Rhode Island for over 33 years and has treated psychiatric patients (mostly children and adolescents) as outpatients, in psychiatric hospitals and partial hospitals, and at Community Mental Health Centers. This length and variety of experiences I believe has given me a unique opportunity to understand the needs of patients with psychiatric difficulties, the services available and as I would like to address in this letter, the frequent lack of services. This letter is currently supporting these 3 bills and although each of them can be helpful standing alone, the crises in mental health care has been caused by many factors and therefore must be addressed from several different directions.

There have been many blocks to effective Psychiatric care and H 7876 which can tighten up definition of standards of care and medical necessity addresses many of them. Too often treatment is interfered with, can be ineffective, or addresses only an acute concern or crises without addressing the cause of the current situation or even the attempt to prevent further crises. A major reason for this is that medical necessity is so often defined by insurance companies. I have spent many hours and participated in probably hundreds of managed care reviews attempting to keep a patient in the hospital until we have met the goals not only of immediate safety but also to understand the cause of their need for the hospital, and the prevention of further crises and further hospitalizations. Prevention of hospitalizations ultimately should be helpful for the financial goals of the insurance company. However, the short-sighted goal of immediate safety only or the "one size fits all" criteria of the insurance companies makes this difficult to achieve. An insurance company's refusal to pay for a recommended level of care and instead offering a lower level of care, even if not considered appropriate or even available, puts the patient at risk, their family and the community potentially at risk. Appropriate treatment should also ultimately lessen the financial burden of insurance companies by the more likely prevention of longer-term, higher levels of care, including hospitalizations.

Passing H 7624 which can eliminate the need for prior authorization for in network mental health treatment can substantially decrease the administrative burden for those of us trying to provide care. More importantly it also prevents the unnecessary delay of treatment and the increase of anxiety for patients and their families as they wait for treatment while in a crises and even wonder if they will be able to have the treatment.

Considering the many ways that treatment can be given with an increase in flexibility and sufficient resources, crises mobile response and stabilization services if paid for can more readily and safely meet with patients where they are. They can then transport them to emergency departments or possibly allow them to continue community treatment. Insurance coverage for this service both for children and adults can save lives as well as possibly save unnecessary trips to the Emergency departments.

I believe it is important to remind ourselves that mental illness is much more common than we think, can be very serious, often dangerous, and also, often very chronic. In these cases, it is not like a bad cold that quickly gets better or a pneumonia that a brief treatment or antibiotics will cure. It can be more like diabetes or chronic heart disease, the result of biological, social, and personality factors that can require comprehensive and ongoing treatment to address any immediate exacerbation and to prevent further deterioration. It is for these reasons that these bills as well as other similar supportive bills for mental health treatment are so important to pass. They can help avoid the roadblocks of effective treatment as well as add needed and valuable treatment options that can go a long way to help those in need and to help to make our state proud of the compassionate psychiatric care we provide.

Thank you for your time, and consideration of these bills.

Sincerely,

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