



**To:** House Health and Human Services Committee

**From:** Rhode Island Birth Worker Cooperative, Inc.

**Date:** March 13, 2025

**Re:** House Bill 5861- Insurance Coverage of Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors

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The Rhode Island Birth Worker Cooperative is one of the organizations represented in the Coalition to Improve RI Maternal Care advocating to pass House Bill 5861 to require insurance coverage for the services of Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors. RIBWC is headquartered in East Providence, Rhode Island and represents over 60 local community doulas and LLCs. The coalition is dedicated to promoting better maternal health care, including improved access to lactation support workers to provide support and education to families as they establish a breastfeeding (or chestfeeding) relationship with their infants.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for approximately the first six months after birth, followed by the introduction of appropriate complementary foods, and continuing breastfeeding for as long as mutually desired by the parent and child, often for two years or beyond.

Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs) play a vital role in supporting new mothers and families by providing expert guidance on breastfeeding. However, despite the proven benefits of breastfeeding for both maternal and infant health, many families in Rhode Island face financial barriers when seeking professional lactation support. Allowing CLCs to accept insurance would significantly improve access to these essential services and provide families with more flexibility in meeting their needs.

CLCs offer critical support for a wide range of breastfeeding challenges, especially in the early days and weeks postpartum. Expanding insurance coverage to include CLCs would give families the option of receiving high-quality care from a qualified professional and their availability can help reduce wait times and provide more immediate, flexible care to families. This can be particularly beneficial for families who are experiencing common breastfeeding challenges such as latch issues, nipple pain, or milk supply concerns—issues that CLCs are well-equipped to address. By expanding access to CLCs, Rhode Island can ensure that more families receive timely, affordable support, which can prevent breastfeeding problems from escalating into more serious issues.

Moreover, insurance coverage for lactation counseling is not just an economic matter—it is a public health issue. Research has consistently shown that breastfeeding can lower the risks of infections, asthma, obesity, severe lower respiratory disease, ear infections, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and developmental delays in infants. For preterm infants, human milk lowers the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), a severe and potentially life-threatening condition. Parents who breastfeed also experience a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure. However, without financial support, many families are unable to access the professional help they need when facing breastfeeding challenges.

By enabling CLCs to accept insurance, Rhode Island would be valuing lactation counseling as an integral part of maternal and child healthcare, aligning with the state's broader goals of improving maternal and child health outcomes. Furthermore, increasing access to lactation support could reduce long-term healthcare costs by preventing complications that might arise from inadequate breastfeeding, such as infant malnutrition or prolonged illness. In turn, this would contribute to the overall health and well-being of Rhode Island's population, reducing strain on healthcare systems and improving health equity for all families.

Rhode Island Birth Worker Co-op strongly supports House Bill 5861 and urges passage. With your leadership, we can improve health equity and improve the maternal health landscape in Rhode Island. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

RIBWC Board of Directors

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