



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 [FAX]

Testimony Re: House Bill 5861- Requiring Health Insurance Policies to Cover Licensed Certified Lactation Counselor Services for Childbearing Families

House Health and Human Services Committee

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Michaela Carroll, Policy Associate

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 5861. This bill would require health insurance policies to cover the services of licensed certified lactation counselors for childbearing families.

Breastfeeding (or chestfeeding) and human milk are the normative standards for infant feeding and nutrition. Breastmilk provide both short- and long-term advantages and health benefits for infants and breastfeeding parents.

Breastfeeding is associated with a lower risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), asthma, ear infections, childhood and adult obesity, infant mortality, and diabetes. For pre-term infants, human milk reduces the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), which can be severe and life-threatening. It is also associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancer, and hypertension for the lactating parent. Breastfeeding also provides significant social and economic benefits, including reduced cost to families, reduced healthcare costs, and reduced employee absenteeism.

The American Association of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months, and breastfeeding with complementary foods for two years or longer, as mutually desired by parent and child. However, less than one quarter of infants in Rhode Island are exclusively breastfed for at least 6 months, and only one third of babies are breastfed at 12 months.

Despite the many benefits, breastfeeding does not happen easily for all families. Difficulty with latching the baby, concerns about milk supply, and lack of knowledge about infant feeding behaviors can make establishing and maintaining a positive, successful breastfeeding relationship difficult. Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs) can provide safe, evidence-based counseling for pregnant, lactating, and breastfeeding families. They can assess breastfeeding and milk transfer, link families to programs and resources in the community, and help families achieve their breastfeeding and lactation goals. Despite all of these known benefits of CLCs' services, some families are unable to access the services of licensed CLCs because their insurance does not cover these providers. **House Bill 5861 would expand**

Rhode Island families' access to these knowledgeable and skilled providers, enabling them to navigate their breastfeeding and lactation experiences with the support of a trained provider.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown on licensing CLCs. We urge passage of this bill to increase Rhode Island families' access to breastfeeding professionals and improve the health of Rhode Island children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org

