



To: House Health & Human Services Committee
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition
Date: April 1, 2025
Re: **SUPPORT H5863 – Reimbursement Rates in Behavioral Healthcare**

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a goal to protect and promote comprehensive, quality, affordable healthcare for all. The Coalition supports House Bill 5863 and thanks Representative Tanzi for her work on this important legislation.

What the data reveals on reimbursement rates: A recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report revealed that mental health organizations cited inadequate reimbursement rates for services as one of the main reasons individuals cannot access mental health care, even when they have insurance¹. In other words, there is not much of an incentive for providers to take insurance if they aren't guaranteed adequate payment. As noted in a Milliman Research Group 2019 evaluation, Rhode Island's mental health professionals received 23.4% less than other specialists for the evaluation and management of similar conditions.² The Research Triangle Institute reached similar conclusions of unfair reimbursement rates in insurance plans, finding that commercial health plans reimbursed behavioral health clinicians 11% and 4% less than Medicare reimbursement levels, on average, in 2019 and 2020 for in-network office visits.³ At the same time, patients went out of network more frequently for mental health care and paid higher cost-sharing as a result.

The impact on Rhode Islanders' access to care:

- In February of 2023, 30.4% of adults in Rhode Island reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder, of those, 19.9% reported unmet need in accessing counseling or therapy.⁴ ([Kaiser Family Foundation](https://www.kaiserfamilyfoundation.org/)) This is an improvement over 2021, but a still stark reality.
- In Rhode Island in 2022, more than half (59%) of children ages three to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care.⁵ ([RI Kids Count](https://www.rikidscount.org/))

Improving reimbursement rates is crucially important to keep professionals in practice now and contributes to the ongoing effort to sustain and build a robust network of mental health professionals in Rhode Island.

This legislation cannot wait; Rhode Island adults and children who desperately need help and are legally entitled to it under federal and state mental health parity laws continue to languish without adequate care.

We urge the Committee's support. Thank you.

Protect Our Healthcare Coalition partners include: Economic Progress Institute, RIPIN, Mental Health Association RI, RI Health Center Association, Latino Policy Institute, Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone (CPO-HEZ), United Way of Rhode Island, Senior Agenda Coalition RI, RI Medical Society, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, RI Community Food Bank, RI Psychological Association, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), National Association of Social Workers RI Chapter, The Womxn Project, Advocates for Better Care

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104597>

² <https://www.milliman.com/en/insight/Addiction-and-mental-health-vs-physical-health-Widening-disparities-in-network-use-and-p>

³ https://mamh-web.files.svdcdn.com/production/files/RTI_Behavioral_Health_Parity_Report.pdf? (pg 28)

⁴ <https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/rhode-island/>

⁵ https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/childrens-mental-health_fb2024.pdf