

Written Testimony to the Rhode Island General Assembly

To: House Health and Human Services Committee

From: Alex Ivanchev

Date: April 10, 2025

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

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony today. Thank you to Representatives Stewart, Fogarty, McGaw, Cruz, and Casimiro for sponsoring this bill.

My name is Alex Ivanchev and I'm writing in support of House Bill 5861. This bill requires insurance coverage of the services of Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors.

I am a Master's student at the Brown University School of Public Health with a specialized concentration in reproductive justice. Through my prior work experiences matching pregnant people with lactation counselors, I have grown to strongly support this service as it is critical to achieving birthin equity. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding to initiate from the point of birth until at least 6 months after birth. However, this recommendation has yet to fully realize in Rhode Island due to barriers preventing parents from receiving support.

Lactation counseling will help fully realize WHO's recommendation as it promotes key breastfeeding indicators: earlier initiation of breastfeeding and longer duration of breastfeeding postpartum. Further, CLCs directly address racial disparities in lactation. Black women have been aggressively marketed to purchase formula instead of receiving important knowledge to breastfeed themselves. Providing women with access to information and breastfeeding techniques from CLCs would redistribute knowledge asymmetries and facilitate a healthier postpartum period for both parents and children.

Not only would this House bill encourage pregnant patients to seek lactation counseling if they see fit, but insurance coverage for CLCs would remove economic barriers for low-income parents to access this knowledge and skills building from the counselor. Bi-partisan backing for this bill excites me, and reflects support for a common-sense measure to promote the health of mothers and children.

I urge you to pass House Bill 5861 to require insurance coverage of the services of Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors to improve Rhode Islanders' access to lactation support. This counseling is critical to advancing reproductive justice and reconnecting mothers with their children through this natural, biological process. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

All My Best,
Alex Ivanchev