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From: Dilenia Cruz <dcruz@progresolatino.org>
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 8:48 PM
To: House Health and Human Services Committee
Cc: Dominga Taveras; Mario Bueno; Cindy Montoya
Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bill H 6117

Testimony in Support of House Bill H 6117

By: Dilenia Cruz Rodriguez, Community Health Worker at Progreso Latino – Rhode Island

Chairperson, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of **House Bill H 6117**, which would require commercial insurance companies to reimburse for services provided by **Community Health Workers (CHWs)**. My name is Dilenia Cruz Rodriguez, and I have been working as a CHW in Rhode Island for nearly 8 years, primarily serving the Latin immigrant community through **Progreso Latino**.

I stand before you not only as a professional, but as someone who has witnessed firsthand how CHWs change lives—quietly, consistently, and often invisibly.

Many of the families I work with live in the margins. Some are undocumented, many face language barriers, lack access to healthcare, and live with uncertainty every day. Yet no matter their legal status or insurance coverage, **we show up**—because that's what CHWs do. We are trusted members of the communities we serve. We meet people where they are, physically and emotionally.

In my role as Wellness Community Specialist at Progreso Latino, I have helped families find emergency shelter, apply for food assistance, secure warm clothing in the winter, and connect to mental health services and primary care providers. We assist patients in applying for public insurance programs when possible, and we help them understand and use the health coverage they have.

But here's the reality: **many of the people we serve do have private insurance through work or family members, and yet CHW services are not covered**. That means that the people who need the most support navigating the system are often left without the one person who could help them most effectively.

Community Health Workers provide **patient-centered care**—we don't just respond to illness; we help prevent it. We don't treat just symptoms; we work on the root causes: housing instability, food insecurity, lack of access to preventive care. We advocate, educate, translate, and walk side by side with patients. We bridge the gap between the health system and the real-life circumstances people face every day.

Without sustainable funding—including **reimbursement from private insurers**—our work remains undervalued and at risk. This bill is about equity. It's about recognizing that CHWs are a vital part of the healthcare team. It's about honoring the voices of the communities we serve by investing in those who serve them most closely.

I urge you to support House Bill H 6117, not just for CHWs like me at **Progreso Latino**, but for the thousands of Rhode Islanders whose health and dignity depend on the support we provide—quietly, behind the scenes, every day.

Thank you.



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