

To: House Health & Human Services Committee

From: Heather Clegg, School Based community Health worker, Thundermist Health Center

Date: April 9, 2025

Re: Support for H6117

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Heather Clegg and I am a school-based community Health Worker for Thundermist Health. A grant funded position. I am writing to urge you to support H6117 to require private insurers to pay for Community Health Worker services.

For the past year I have worked for Thundermist Health Center as a Community Health Worker. Thundermist is a facility that offers healthcare, dental services, and social services to those in need. As a community Health Worker I have worked with patients and their families ensuring that they get the level of care available to them. Traveling to their homes, coordinating appointments, making sure they have transportation, health insurance, childcare, adequate food and housing. Often the healthcare system can be difficult to navigate, as a community health worker we are highly trained in assisting our clients. This program was cut in September due to funding issues. I was fortunate to be offered a school-based community health worker position, grant funded.

As a school-based community health worker, I have been able to connect children with behavioral health clinicians during the school day, offering telehealth therapy. This ensures that children get the services they deserve, a quiet safe space, while their parents are able to work. We provide a personal needs pantry. We have food and toiletries available for anyone in need. This program helps children improve their overall health and education with people they trust.

While we help all children that are referred to us, currently CHWs can only bill Medicaid patients for reimbursement. Because our employers cannot bill all insurers for our services, our employers must rely on grants and donations to fill in gaps. Without a reliable

funding stream to support our vital work with patients, our positions are often first to be eliminated.

I have had the pleasure of watching the children we work with flourish and grow while participating in our school-based program. A lot of children will come to their first appointments anxious. In a small amount of time, they begin to look forward to their meetings. A student that simply needed a pair of sneakers to participate in gym was able to join the class, bringing his grade up. With our program he was able to tell us why he was not going to class and the problem was easily solved.

By passing H6117, we help sustain the vital roles of the Community Health Workers in helping RI residents stay healthier, reducing hospital stays and overall medical costs, and most importantly, promoting trust in the healthcare system. This bill also affirms the value of CHW as essential providers. Please support this legislation to help build a more equitable and accessible healthcare system for all Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your time and commitment to public service,

Heather Clegg

Heather Clegg (she/her)

*Community Health Worker/Administrative Assistant*

*1 River Street*

*Wakefield RI 02879*

*401-602-6759*