

House Health & Human Services Committee
Community Health Worker
Saving Hopes Wellness Center
May 13, 2025

Re: Testimony in Support of H6117/S0705 – Reimbursement for Community Health Workers

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Maria Belen Suastegui Mata, and I am a Certified Community Health Worker (CCHW) currently working at Saving Hopes Wellness Center. I have been serving my community in Rhode Island for over a year, and I am writing today to express my strong support for H6117/S0705, which would require commercial insurers to reimburse for Community Health Worker (CHW) services.

When I arrived in this country a year and a half ago, I felt completely lost. I didn't know where to start or how to connect with the community. That changed when I began volunteering at Progreso Latino. It was a life-changing experience. I learned what a Community Health Worker was, and I realized the enormous impact CHWs have on people's lives. I still remember someone saying, "How can a person be healthy if they don't have a place to live, or if they struggle with mental health and can't function to their full capacity?" Until that moment, I thought being healthy was only about the physical body — but that opened my eyes.

From that first experience, I knew I wanted to be part of this world. I later volunteered at the Miriam Hospital, which was another amazing opportunity. Eventually, I became a CHW myself, and now, as a certified CCHW, I work at Saving Hopes Wellness Center. There, we help people in many areas — housing, health insurance, connecting to resources, scheduling and attending medical appointments, and more. We don't just help with paperwork; we help people move forward in life. We give them tools, support their mental health, and help them see that there is a way out of their challenges. That kind of impact is hard to measure, but it is very real.

Currently, CHWs can only be reimbursed by Medicaid. That limitation puts our positions at risk, because our employers have to rely on grants or outside donations. Our work is essential, and without proper funding, we can't reach all the

people who need us. Every day, I see how important it is to have a CHW by someone's side — especially for those who don't know where to begin. For many, a CHW is the first person who truly listens and connects them to life-changing care.

By passing H6117/S0705, Rhode Island will not only recognize the true value of CHWs, but also ensure that our work continues to reach the people who need it most. This bill affirms our role as essential providers in the health care system, and it helps us build a more equitable and accessible system for all.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony. I urge you to support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Maria Belen Suastegui Mata

Certified Community Health Worker

Saving Hopes Wellness Center