



April 8, 2025

The Honorable Representative Robert Craven
Chair of the House Judiciary Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bill 6122 - Section 504 Protections for People with Disabilities

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your past support for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and the establishment of an Olmstead Plan. The Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHARI) is also thankful for the opportunity to share our support for House Bill 6122, related to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. We thank Chairman Joseph McNamara for introducing this important legislation.

One in five adults in Rhode Island lives with a mental illness. About 6% of Rhode Islanders have a serious persistent mental illness (SPMI), which makes it difficult or impossible for them to carry out daily tasks. Rhode Islanders with SPMI and other disabilities are at risk of losing crucial protections. There is a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 is a federal statute that provides protections for people with disabilities in settings, activities, agencies and programs that receive federal funding. Most of the protections provided in Section 504 are already contained within Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL). There are a few statutes in RIGL, however, that specifically refer to Section 504. The legislation before you ensures that all protections provided in Section 504 are codified into RIGL, should Section 504 be dismantled by the federal lawsuit or federal Executive Orders.

While the numbers cited above are important, one must not forget that these individuals are our fathers, mothers, children, friends and neighbors. MHARI believes it is our moral responsibility to protect our most vulnerable Rhode Islanders. That is why we strongly support this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie-Marie Pisciotta'.

Laurie-Marie Pisciotta
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