



Testimony Re: House Bill 7277- Requiring Health Insurance Plans to Cover Licensed Certified Lactation Counselor Services for Childbearing Families

House Health and Human Services Committee

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Michaela Carroll, Policy Associate

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 7277. We would like to thank Representatives Stewart, Donovan, Boylan, Hopkins, Cotter, Caldwell, Fogarty, Cruz, Giraldo, and Place for their support of this bill. This bill would require insurance plans to cover licensed certified lactation counselor services for childbearing families.

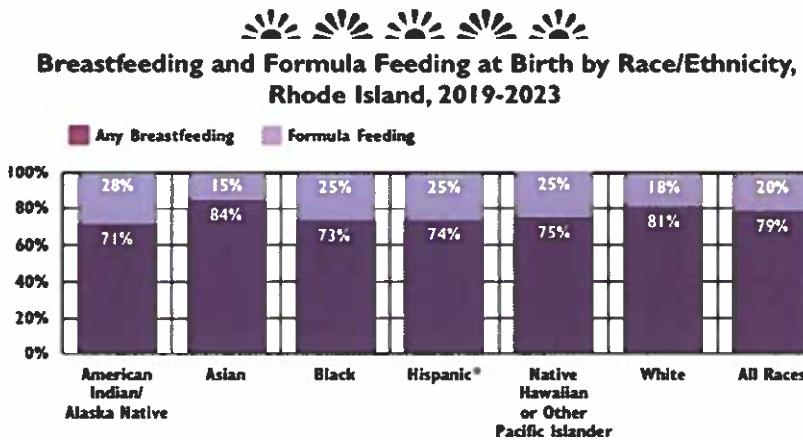
Breastfeeding (or chestfeeding) and human milk are the normative standards for infant feeding and nutrition. Breastmilk provides both short- and long-term advantages and health benefits for infants and breastfeeding parents.

Breastfeeding is associated with a lower risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), asthma, ear infections, childhood and adult obesity, infant mortality, and diabetes. For pre-term infants, human milk reduces the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), which can be severe and life-threatening. It is also associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancer, and hypertension for the lactating parent. Breastfeeding also provides significant social and economic benefits, including reduced costs to families, reduced health care costs, and reduced employee absenteeism.

The American Association of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months, and breastfeeding with complementary foods for two years or longer, as mutually desired by parent and child. Although nearly 80% of families in Rhode Island intend to breastfeed their baby when they are discharged from the hospital after birth, less than one quarter of infants in Rhode Island are exclusively breastfed for at least 6 months, and only one third of babies are breastfed at 12 months.

Despite the many benefits, breastfeeding does not happen easily for all families. Difficulty with latching the baby, concerns about milk supply, and lack of knowledge about infant feeding behaviors can make establishing and maintaining a positive, successful breastfeeding relationship difficult. Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs) can provide safe, evidence-based counseling for pregnant, lactating, and breastfeeding families. They can

assess breastfeeding and milk transfer, link families to programs and resources in the community, and help families achieve their breastfeeding and lactation goals. Despite these known benefits of CLCs' services, some families are unable to access the services of licensed CLCs because their insurance does not cover these providers. Additionally, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander infants are less likely to be breastfed than white and Asian infants, due to structural, interpersonal, cultural, and historical barriers that Women of Color face.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health [RIDOH]. (2024). *KIDSNET, 2019-2023*. Center for Health Data and Analysis. Breastfeeding and formula feeding are defined as intended feeding method at hospital discharge. *Hispanic infants can be of any race. Totals may not sum to 100% because data on feeding methods were not available for all births.

House Bill 7277 would expand Rhode Island families' access to these knowledgeable and skilled providers, enabling them to navigate their breastfeeding and lactation experiences with the support of a trained provider. We urge passage of this bill to increase Rhode Island families' access to breastfeeding professionals and improve the health of Rhode Island children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.