



## Connecticut & Rhode Island

March 19, 2026

The Honorable Susan Donovan, Chairwoman

House Committee on Health and Human Services

State House

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

**RE: H7542 - Support**

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of LeadingAge Connecticut & Rhode Island and our Rhode Island members, I am writing to express strong support for House Bill 7542, which would establish a full-time, permanent Dementia Services Coordinator within the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Rhode Island is facing a growing public health challenge related to Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. According to the most recent data, approximately 24,000 Rhode Islanders are living with Alzheimer's disease, and 11.4% of Rhode Islanders over the age of 65 are affected. In addition, 37,000 caregivers provide more than 52 million hours of unpaid care each year, reflecting the profound impact dementia has on families and communities across our state. The financial costs are also substantial, with Medicaid expenditures for individuals living with Alzheimer's reaching \$613 million and per capita Medicare spending averaging \$31,741 in 2023.

Despite the magnitude of this challenge, Rhode Island currently lacks a centralized, coordinated approach to addressing dementia-related services, policy, and planning. Thirty-three states have already created state-funded Dementia Services Coordinator positions, and their experience demonstrates that these roles significantly improve coordination across agencies, reduce duplication of services, strengthen the ability to secure federal and state funding, and ensure the effective implementation of state Alzheimer's plans.

The proposed Dementia Services Coordinator would play a critical role in Rhode Island by:

- Coordinating the Department of Health's approach to Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, including public awareness, prevention, and early detection

- Overseeing the implementation and ongoing updates of the Rhode Island Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders State Plan
- Assessing and analyzing dementia-related data collected by the state
- Evaluating state-funded dementia services and identifying opportunities for improvement
- Supporting dementia-specific training programs for providers and caregivers
- Strengthening collaboration among agencies, providers, and community organizations
- Recommending strategies to improve coordination of services and resources
- Identifying grant opportunities to expand support for individuals living with dementia and their caregivers

The Rhode Island Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders recently approved the 2024–2029 State Plan, which outlines strategic goals to help all Rhode Islanders understand dementia, adopt brain-healthy lifestyles, and achieve the best possible quality of life as they age. However, the success of this plan depends on strong statewide coordination and leadership. Establishing a permanent Dementia Services Coordinator is the key step needed to translate this plan into meaningful action.

As Alzheimer's disease continues to grow nationwide—affecting nearly 7 million Americans today and projected to reach 12.7 million by 2050—states are increasingly on the front lines of addressing the care, workforce, and economic challenges associated with the disease. Rhode Island must ensure it has the infrastructure and leadership necessary to meet these challenges effectively.

For these reasons, LeadingAge Connecticut & Rhode Island respectfully urges the committee to support passage of H7542. Establishing a Dementia Services Coordinator will help Rhode Island better coordinate services, strengthen policy development, and improve the lives of individuals living with dementia and the caregivers who support them.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and for your continued leadership on behalf of Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Mag Morelli

President

LeadingAge Connecticut & Rhode Island