

Support for House Bill 7346

March 24, 2026

Dear Chairwomen Donovan and Health and Human Services Committee Members

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, living and practicing in Rhode Island for almost 36 years. I have been concerned that so many people have difficulty finding mental health care. My experience before moving to Rhode Island taught me that severely ill patients often required a long time in a hospital for adequate psychiatric treatment. However, after moving to Rhode Island, I learned that excellent treatment can happen in a much shorter time, often requiring only brief, short-term hospitalization or even totally avoiding hospitals. This, of course, requires excellent and available outpatient services. Sometimes this excellent care is available, but too often it is not. Despite the high quality of mental health providers in Rhode Island, many patients with psychiatric difficulties do not get the mental health care they need and deserve. When urgent psychiatric care is needed, it is not unusual that patients are hospitalized, or their hospital stay is extended, because adequate lower or mid-level treatment is not available to prevent or shorten hospital stay. Tragically, some patients don't receive any treatment at all.

The mental health crisis we have been in over the last several years has not stopped. The provision of outpatient psychiatric care, treatment for seriously ill patients, or prevention of hospitalization, often requires a comprehensive, coordinated team of mental health providers, with different levels of education and expertise. However, these services are limited by insufficient funding. While we are fortunate in Rhode Island to have many agencies with expertise in treating psychiatric illness, those agencies are often not able to retain their skilled and dedicated employees or hire enough new clinicians. Many talented psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers do not accept insurance because of poor reimbursements. Too many mental health clinicians leave Rhode Island for opportunities in other states where the reimbursements are more favorable, or even leave the field entirely, further depleting the mental health workforce.

I therefore strongly support this bill H7346 that would prohibit insurance companies from paying psychiatric providers a rate that is less than the approved Medicaid rate set by the executive office of health and human services. This at least gives these clinicians some sense of security that could allow them to remain in Rhode Island treating Rhode Island patients. Furthermore, this treatment will often include preventative care, which, I believe, not only benefits patients but ultimately saves money for insurance companies. Rhode Island has previously had a nationally recognized behavioral health system, and we can again, if we invest in all necessary levels of care and insurance companies do their part by appropriately funding the necessary workforce to provide this treatment.

I believe there will be numerous benefits for our state if we move forward with this bill. In addition, this will also help to fulfill our ethical obligations and bring pride to our state for our care for most vulnerable citizens

I would like to thank Representatives Hull, J. Lombardi, DeSimone, Tanzi, Felix, Azzinaro, Alzate, Bennett, Slater, and Diaz for introducing this bill and the House Health and Human services Committee for considering this bill.

Sincerely, Gerald Tarnoff, MD  
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