



April 9, 2026

The Honorable Louis DiPalma  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee,  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: Executive Office of Health and Human Services – Governor's FY2027 Budget

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee,

My name is Max De Faria, and I serve as the Director of the South Providence Health Equity Zone (HEZ). I am honored to work with Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI), the proud backbone agency for our HEZ. I am writing to express my strong support for strengthening and expanding investment in Rhode Island's Health Equity Zones in the Governor's budget. Accordingly, we respectfully request \$2.1 million in funding to support the infrastructure of all HEZs across Rhode Island.

Health Equity Zones are one of the most effective, community-driven strategies we have to address health inequities across our state. The HEZ initiative serves Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents by utilizing a unique, community-driven approach to improving the overall health and resilience of communities.

This nationally recognized model has measurably demonstrated its impact over the last ten years, such as: reducing healthcare costs; reducing rates of chronic disease; and strengthening community resilience and recovery. If we are serious about improving health outcomes and reducing long-term costs, we must invest in prevention, and HEZs are a proven model of upstream, cost-effective investment.

In South Providence, the local HEZ's activities over the past year included hosting a Perinatal Health Fair; investing in green workforce development through youth training in urban and community forestry; and distributing free air filters through partnerships with community organizations and libraries. While these initiatives address key needs, it is important that the State invests ongoingly in HEZ activities to ensure long-term impact and scalability.

The HEZ network is an integral part of our state's ability to support our most vulnerable residents, and ultimately create healthy, equitable communities. It is vital that the HEZ initiative is adequately funded to ensure sustainable continuation of its critical work. A \$2.1million allocation guarantees individual support for each HEZ.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,  
Max De Faria  
Director, South Providence Health Equity Zone, Family Service of Rhode Island