

March 31, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Murray, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Via email to: [SLegislation@rilegislature.gov](mailto:SLegislation@rilegislature.gov)

Re: SB 2859, relating to business and professionals (physician assistants)

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (Blue Cross), I am writing to share information and support for this proposal which would create a specialty licensure designation for physician assistants providing behavioral health services.

We appreciate the sponsors' recognition of Rhode Island's behavioral health workforce needs. Blue Cross shares the sponsors' and advocates' commitment to accessible, high-quality, affordable behavioral health services.

- We strongly support behavioral health providers and the patients they serve, and we have consistently invested in behavioral health through increased payment rates, innovative payment arrangements, and collaborations designed to improve access, integration with medical care, and patient outcomes.
- **In dollar terms, the cost of behavioral healthcare for fully insured members grew from \$42 million in 2020 to \$62 million in 2025.** On a per-member basis, the cost of care increased 70%. This growth reflects increases in the amount of care delivered (utilization) as well as the prices paid for that care (reimbursement rates), while the number of fully insured members decreased.

**Physician assistants are highly trained medical professionals. This proposal reflects a shared interest in ensuring patients seeking treatment for behavioral health receive care from practitioners who are well trained in that specialty.** Aligning state licensure with some national standards or otherwise agreed-to criteria will provide an important safeguard for patients. This will ensure patients understand the qualifications and experience of the practitioner delivering their care.

Senate Bill 2859 as a **constructive starting point** for a broader conversation about specialty recognition within physician assistant licensure. We are particularly interested in continued engagement with patient advocates, behavioral health practitioners, and other stakeholders to ensure that any new licensure designation is implemented in a manner that supports access, maintains quality, and reflects the lived experiences of patients and providers working within Rhode Island's behavioral health system.

We hold physician assistants in high regard and recognize the important role they play in expanding access to behavioral health services across the state. We appreciate the Committee's thoughtful consideration of this issue and look forward to working collaboratively on this proposal.

Sincerely,

**Richard Glucksmann**

Senior Government Relations Counsel