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Informational Testimony Re: 7338 – Mental Health Services For All Students

House Health, Education & Welfare Committee

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written information testimony on H7338 that would allow for services provided by school social workers and certified school psychologists to be included as health care related services eligible for federal Medicaid reimbursement.

Children's Mental Health

Mental health in childhood and adolescence is defined as the achievement of expected developmental, cognitive, social, and emotional milestones and the ability to use effective coping skills. Mental health influences children's health and behavior at home, in school, and in the community. Mental health conditions can impair daily functioning, prevent or affect academic achievement, increase involvement with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, result in high treatment costs, diminish family incomes, and increase the risk for suicide. Children with mental health issues are also likely to have other chronic health conditions.^{1,2,3,4}

Mental health problems affect children of all backgrounds. Nationally, 10% of children under age five experience a significant mental health issue.⁵ In Rhode Island, one in five (19.0%) children ages six to 17 has a diagnosable mental health problem; one in ten (9.8%) has significant functional impairment.⁶

Risk factors for childhood mental disorders include prenatal exposure to alcohol, physical and sexual abuse, adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, genes or a family history of mental health issues, involvement with juvenile justice and child welfare systems, and living in poverty.^{7,8,9}

Mental health treatment systems tend to be fragmented and crisis-driven with disproportionate spending on high-end care and often lack adequate investments in prevention and community-based services.^{10,11,12} **In Rhode Island, an estimated 37% of children ages three to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care.**

Children with Medicaid and RItE Care with a Mental Health Diagnosis

In 27% (33,407) of children under age 19 enrolled in Medicaid/RItE Care had a mental health diagnosis. Of those children with a mental health diagnosis, 21% were ages 6 and under, 37% were ages seven to 12, and 42% were ages 13 to 18. In addition, 42% were females and 58% were males.¹³

In 2018, 1,486 children under age 19 enrolled in Medicaid/Rite Care were hospitalized due a mental health related condition (up from 983 in 2016) and 2,649 children had a mental health related emergency department visit (up from 1,690 in 2016, a 57% increase). Eighty-seven percent of those mental health-related emergency department visits did not result in a hospitalization.¹⁴

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts that improve school climate and provide resources to school districts that help ensure schools are safe and secure places that are conducive to learning including investment in school mental health professionals to address trauma and mental health conditions that can impact student's health and behavior at school.

References

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^{3,9} Murphey, D., Vaughn, B., & Barry, M. (2013). Adolescent health highlight: Access to mental health care. (Publication No. 2013-2). Washington, DC: Child Trends.

⁴ Smith, J. P. & Smith, G. C. (2010). Long-term economic costs of psychological problems during childhood. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71, 110-115.

⁵ Gleason, M. M., Goldson, E., Yogman, M. W., & Council on Early Childhood. (2016). Addressing early childhood emotional and behavioral problems. *Pediatrics*, 138(6), e1-e13.

⁶ Kim, H. K., Viner-Brown, S. I., & Garcia, J. (2007). Children's mental health and family functioning in Rhode Island. *Pediatrics*, 119(Supplement 1), S22- S28.

⁸ Murphey, D., et al. (2014). *Are the children well? A model and recommendations for promoting the mental wellness of the nation's young people*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & Child Trends.

¹⁰ Wissow, L., van Ginneken, N., Chandna, J., and Rahman, A. (2016). *Integrating children's mental health into primary care*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Mental Health in Pediatric Care, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

¹¹ Special Joint Commission to Study the Integration of Primary Care and Behavioral Health: Final report. (2014). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Senate and House of Representatives.

¹² Mental health hearings: Findings and recommendations. (2017). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

^{13,14} Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, MMIS Database, 2017-2018.