



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: S-2944 – Psychiatric Resource Network Funding Act

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for Senate Bill 2944. This bill would create sustainable funding for the Psychiatry Resource Network programs in Rhode Island. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to thank Senator Goodwin for sponsoring this bill.

Rhode Island's Current Psychiatry Resource Networks, MomsPRN and PediPRN provide same-day clinical teleconsultation services and mental health referral for providers of pregnant and postpartum women (MomsPRN) and for primary care providers of children and adolescents (PediPRN). These programs support Rhode Island health care providers by offering same-day specialized clinical consultations and resource/referral services related to mental health, enabling health care providers to provide comprehensive care for their patients more promptly and avoid lengthy wait times for specialized care.

As of January 2022, these two PRN programs have provided support to 2,300 patients and have received over 3,000 calls from 679 different providers at 252 practices in the state. These programs help increase access to behavioral health services by building the capacity and knowledge of frontline and primary care workers and help support a comprehensive and coordinated behavioral health system of care in Rhode Island.

Current behavioral and mental health needs among moms and children in Rhode Island:

- **Prenatal and postpartum mental health screening, evaluation, and treatment** is extremely important to new parents as they navigate the responsibilities of being a new parent and looking after an infant. In Rhode Island between 2018 and 2020, over 29% of women with Medicaid/RIte care experienced depression symptoms during or after their most recent pregnancy compared to only 18% of women with private insurance. Studies have consistently shown that poor maternal mental health is associated with lower quality of maternal-infant bonding. Improving low-income parents' coverage and access to health care is critically important to supporting healthy infants and children. Ensuring women have access to proper mental health resources during the prenatal and postpartum period is important for

identifying preventable health conditions, including maternal depression.

Children and Adolescents: While mental health challenges for youth existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant increase in anxiety and depression among youth of all ages since 2020. Babies and toddlers can and do suffer from mental health conditions caused by trauma, neglect, biological factors, or environmental conditions at similar rates experiences by other children. An already inadequate and struggling system of care for children's behavioral health has been further stressed and overwhelmed by the pandemic. The number of calls to Kids' Link RI, our state's behavioral health triage service and referral network, have doubled during the pandemic. Nationally, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, suicide attempts among adolescents had increased with sharper increases among girls and young women than among males. In 2020 in Rhode Island, 467 teens ages 13 to 19 were admitted to the emergency department after a suicide attempt and 334 teens ages 13 to 19 were hospitalized after a suicide attempt.

While early diagnosis and access to care is critical in addressing mental health conditions, there is a significant shortage of specialized mental health providers and often long waitlists. As a result, much of the burden for initial mental health care falls on frontline clinicians, such as primary care and obstetric providers. They must navigate a complex and overtaxed system to connect their patients with the proper specialized mental health services. Moms and children need the right care, at the right time, in the right place. Senate Bill 2944 would ensure that these key mental health resources and services for moms and children continue to be supported at a time when they are severely needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.