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May 15, 2024

To: House Finance Chairman, Marvin Abney and Members of the Committee

Re: H8004 JOINT RESOLUTION MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$500,000 TO GLORIA GEMMA FOUNDATION

In 2004, the Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation was established to help people touched by cancer find reputable resources and assistance. Over the years, the name Gloria Gemma quickly became synonymous with hope and healing and the number of cancer patients, survivors and loved ones in search of support has steadily increased year-over-year with an exponential demand for services post pandemic, and the Foundation is the only organization in our state to offer cancer rehabilitation services, a vital and absent component of cancer care for people battling the disease.

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) states outpatient cancer rehabilitation services help with lingering and permanent side effects of cancer treatments, including fatigue, depression, anxiety, fear of recurrence, cognitive dysfunction, pain syndromes, peripheral neuropathy, sexual dysfunction, lymphedema, mobility and range of motion issues, and communication difficulty. In addition, cancer rehabilitation empowers people to self-advocate regarding their health and improves their quality of life, preserving the ability to remain in the workforce, and maximizing health and longevity. However, accessing such care often requires navigating through multiple barriers. Although Medicare and private insurances will often pay for certain cancer rehabilitative services, they have funding caps and limit the number of visits. Not to mention, out-of-pocket costs for these services are often too exorbitant for financially stressed survivors. The Gloria Gemma Foundation does not charge for its services and all programs and support services offered to the people we serve are free. In fact, 90-cents of every dollar raised by the Foundation goes directly to its healing programs and 100-percent of funds raised stay in our local community. The Foundation has a stellar reputation for being fiscally responsible and transparent.

The rehabilitative programs that the Foundation provides help people heal from their cancers physically and mentally and these programs enrich people's lives by empowering them to self-advocate for their health and well-being.

- The National Library of Medicine (NLM) at the National Institute of Health (NIH) published a study that looked at the mental health of cancer survivors and reported that a National Health Interview Survey showed “10.1% of cancer survivors reported poor mental health-related quality of life, compared with only 5.9% of adults without cancer. Population-based data suggest that cancer survivors are more than twice as likely to have disabling psychological problems compared with adults without cancer, and individuals who have both cancer and other chronic illnesses have a risk of psychological disability that is nearly 6 times higher than that of adults without cancer.” The rehabilitative programs offered by the Foundation help people heal emotionally from their cancer experiences.
- According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Rhode Island has the highest incidence of breast cancer diagnoses, and the World Population Review rank Rhode Island tenth out of fifty states for highest incidence of all cancers combined. This number, along with the fact that 30.2-percent of Rhode Island women were told by a health professional that they had a depressive disorder, as reported by the United Health Foundation, means almost a third of female cancer patients suffer from mental health issues. The Foundation’s innovative programs enable cancer patients and survivors to receive the mental health care they need without worrying about funding caps, high deductibles, mounting copays and a limited number of sessions.
- The Foundation also offers free nutritional programs and exercise programs. We understand the importance of healing the whole person. Physical and mental well-being go hand in hand. If people feel well physically, they are more likely to feel better mentally and vice versa.
- The Oncology Nursing Society reported that peer-to-peer support provided improvements in emotional health and coping. The Foundation provides networking opportunities for patients and survivors to connect, because there is healing in validation.
- Prior to the pandemic, the Hope Bus Program was the Foundation’s Community Outreach Program. The hugely popular pink 38-foot RV had over 170 site visits yearly and positively impacted 5,000 people annually. It traveled throughout Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts with a primary focus on visiting underserved communities. Unfortunately, after more than ten years of heavy service, the RV became unrepairable. Every effort was made by Foundation staff to secure grants to purchase a new Hope Bus, but after much deliberation, the combined costs of another smaller RV, driver and insurance were over \$400,000. This amount is cost-prohibitive for the Foundation, and we are redesigning the program to include a Sprinter van.
- The Foundation’s focus and priority is providing rehabilitative programs and services to help cancer patients, survivors and their loved ones heal from the trauma of cancer. In addition to providing healing and hope to thousands every year, we may be best known for our annual Flames of Hope: A Celebration of Life™ Weekend, held the first weekend in October. Three events occur in two days, including a free experiential health event that brings the latest in medical cancer care with holistic wellbeing. The Flames of Hope

Weekend attracted visitors from 33 states last year, and positively impacts Providence and surrounding areas economically.

The Gloria Gemma Foundation has been a positive force for Rhode Island's residents and businesses for the past twenty years. We have never previously asked the state for funding, but now that the incidence of cancer is on the rise, as reported by the American Cancer Society and Yale Medicine with more than 2,000,000 estimated diagnoses this year, the Foundation, and its taxed staff of six fulltime and two part-time employees, needs to expand in order to meet the demand. We have begun to waitlist cancer patients for certain programs, but these people need our services in real time—not several months after the fact. With an appropriation from the state of \$500,000, we can hire additional staff to ensure no one who needs our rehabilitative services is waitlisted. We can also move into a larger space, which is needed in order to continue to provide the healing programs we offer.

Respectfully submitted,



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Executive Director

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