

Chris O'Brien

From: Tarnoff, Gerald m <gtarnoff@Lifespan.org>
Sent: Wednesday, May 1, 2024 10:38 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Support H-8078 and H-8079.

May 1, 2024

Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Gerald Tarnoff, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, treating Rhode Island patients, mostly children, since 1990. I am writing to support the passage of senate bills H8079 and H8078.

As you know, our state is experiencing a workforce shortage that impacts many critical areas of health care including primary care, behavioral health care and nursing care. The shortage reduces access to preventative services, threatens access to care, the quality of care, and contributes to increased costs; factors that will likely get even worse if the situation is not actively and sufficiently addressed. This shortage, including the failure of the workforce to adequately reflect the cultural diversity of Rhode Islanders (also a barrier to care) has been a concern for several years, but in its continuation has contributed to a crises situation. This crises in fact, is currently being highlighted on the WJAR Channel 10 News.

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services has convened a public/private partnership to analyze the workforce problems. This collaboration, emphasizing the need to diversify the professional healthcare providers, recommended the Ladders to Licensure grant program (H-8078) to provide support for paraprofessionals to pursue higher education degrees and professional licensure while they continue to work.

I also support investing state funds to expand the health professional loan repayment program (H-7089). This bill can help to increase the number of healthcare professionals working in underserved areas of the state. By increasing the number of doctors, mental health professionals, dentists and other critical providers, we enhance access as well as improve the diversity of providers. Many professionals after years of training with limited income, and years of school, have tremendous debts and to survive and practice, especially early in their career, they will go to where they can earn a living. This bill can help this be in Rhode Island.

As a psychiatrist, particularly working with children and adolescents, I'm acutely aware of the shortage of psychiatric providers and have found that patients have required higher, more restrictive and more expensive levels of care -such as wrap around services, partial or inpatient hospitalizations. Often, with an adequate workforce that can identify, treat, and/or appropriately refer patients this outcome can be avoided.

The causes of this workforce shortage are multi-determined, and I believe have been present for a long time. Therefore, the solutions also need to be multi focused. These two bills, along with Representative Fogarty's bills (H-7903 and H-7902) that address the gap in access to primary care, are I believe, actionable and achievable approaches that can help to make a difference in strengthening and diversifying the workforce and giving Rhode Islanders a greater opportunity to receive the excellent health care (including psychiatric care), they deserve, and that Rhode Island can be proud of. Thank you for your consideration,

Gerald Tarnoff, MD
13 Eton Rd,
Barrington RI, 02806

401-474-4198

This transmission is intended only for the addressee(s) listed above and may contain information that is confidential. If you are not the addressee, any use, disclosure, copying or communication of the contents of this message is prohibited. Please contact me if this message was transmitted in error.