



42 Ladd St. Ste 319
East Greenwich, RI 02818
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May 1, 2024

RE: Support for H-8079 and H-8078

To: Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee

Good morning. My name is Camille M. Moonsammy and I am the owner of the RI based private mental health practice, **The Opening, LLC**. As a certified nurse practitioner specializing in mental health, I have been providing quality behavioral health to over 200 Rhode Islander's since June 2021.

One month after opening, my panel was full and we could not accept new patients until a current patient was discharged. We have been seeking an additional psychiatric nurse practitioner to serve the 50+ patients on our waiting list for over a year. This unfortunate situation is not unusual for a mental health practice in RI due to the current mental health crisis coupled with a national provider shortage.

Our state is experiencing a current and projected workforce shortage in many critical areas of health care including primary care, behavioral health care and nursing care. The shortage reduces access to preventive services, threatens the quality of care, and contributes to increased costs, factors that will exacerbate over time.

The healthcare workforce shortage has been a concern for several years but hit a crisis stage as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many years, the failure of the workforce to adequately reflect the racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of Rhode Islanders has been acknowledged as a barrier to appropriate care.

A public/private partnership convened by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services has collaborated over the past few years to analyze the workforce problems and propose a "Rhode Ahead" framework for addressing them. **The Opening, LLC** participated in several of the zoom meetings.

The group emphasized the need to diversify the professional healthcare workforce so there would be more opportunity for culturally and linguistically appropriate care for Rhode Islanders. Since the paraprofessional workforce is already diverse, the group recommended creating the Ladders to Licensure grant program (H-8078) to

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provide support for paraprofessionals to pursue higher education degrees and professional licensure while they continue to work.

The Opening, LLC also supports investing state funds to expand the health professional loan repayment program (H-8079) which will help 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 in safety-net practices we enhance access as well as improve the diversity of providers. With the cost of living rising nationwide, the burden of costly student loans adds to the already intense stress experienced by essential providers in RI and contributes to provider burnout.

These two bills, along with Representative Fogarty's bills (H-7903 and H-7902) that address the gap in access to primary care, are a clear set of actionable and achievable approaches that will make a demonstrable difference in strengthening and diversifying the workforce.

I have no doubt that either yourself or the members of the House Finance Committee have experienced the negative effects of our current healthcare situation and urge you to support the above-mentioned bills as a sign of your commitment to the welfare of each resident of this state.

Your consideration and time are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Camille Moonsammy', with a large initial 'C' and a long horizontal flourish.

Camille Moonsammy, APRN-BC
Clinical Director, Owner
The Opening, LLC

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