



Parents Leading for Educational Equity
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To: Rhode Island House Finance Committee

From: Parents Leading for Educational Equity

RE: **H 5076 AN ACT MAKING APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE STATE FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2026 (Specifically Article 8, Section 8)**

Chairperson Abney and esteemed members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE) and the families we represent, we are submitting this testimony in strong support of Section 8 of Article 8, which strengthens oversight, accountability, and equitable access to healthcare for Rhode Island's families. Across Rhode Island, families face weeks, sometimes months of waiting for essential pediatric and mental health care. For too many children, this delay means missed developmental milestones, untreated conditions, and greater barriers to learning. Families across Rhode Island, particularly those in low-income and historically marginalized communities, continue to struggle with barriers to essential healthcare services due to provider shortages, inconsistent Medicaid reimbursement rates, and disparities in access to primary and pediatric care. Section 8 provides a long-overdue solution by establishing a biennial review of Medicaid reimbursement rates, ensuring sustainable provider participation and improving healthcare access for children.

Rhode Island is home to over 200,000 children, and nearly 40% rely on Medicaid or CHIP¹ for healthcare coverage. Medicaid supports approximately 50% of births in the state, underscoring its critical role in maternal and early childhood health. Yet, families continue to experience long wait times for pediatricians and mental health services, often due to a shortage of providers willing to accept Medicaid patients. A 2023 Kaiser Family Foundation report found that states with structured Medicaid rate reviews see higher provider participation and improved health outcomes for children². Additionally, research from the American Academy of Pediatrics

¹ National Academy for State Health Policy

² Kaiser Family Foundation

highlights that inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates lead to a 20-30% decrease in pediatric provider participation, making it even harder for children to access preventive care, developmental screenings, and mental health support. Without regular rate reviews, reimbursement rates fail to keep pace with rising healthcare costs, further exacerbating access disparities in communities that need care the most³.

The inclusion of primary and pediatric care in the biennial rate review is essential to addressing these challenges. One in five Rhode Island children has a diagnosed mental health condition, yet many families report waiting weeks or months for an appointment due to provider shortages. Well-child visit attendance among Medicaid-enrolled children is over 20 percentage points lower than among privately insured children, a gap that results in delayed vaccinations, untreated conditions, and long-term developmental setbacks. A structured reimbursement review would help increase provider participation, reduce wait times, and ensure that all children—regardless of income—have access to timely and high-quality healthcare. States that have implemented similar reforms have seen improvements in well-child visit rates, vaccination coverage, and early intervention for developmental disabilities⁴.

In addition to ensuring fair and sustainable funding for providers, Section 8 also promotes greater transparency and public engagement by requiring public reporting and stakeholder input on Medicaid rate adjustments. This will allow parents, healthcare advocates, and community organizations like PLEE to actively participate in shaping policies that impact children's health and well-being⁵. Given the direct connection between access to healthcare and educational success, this reform is not just about Medicaid funding—it is about ensuring that Rhode Island's children are healthy, ready to learn, and positioned for a strong future.

The time to act is now. Rhode Island's children cannot afford to wait for the care they deserve. We urge the committee to pass Section 8 of Article 8 and take a crucial step toward a healthier, more equitable future for all families.

³ American Academy of Pediatrics

⁴ Jenco, Melissa

⁵ Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission

Best regards,

Ramona Santos Torres

Co-Founder & Executive Director

Relevant Data & Sources

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