



April 1, 2025

The Honorable Representative Marvin Abney  
Chair of the House Finance Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support for EOHHS and Olmstead Coordinator**

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your support and advocacy for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and the establishment of an Olmstead Plan. The Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHARI) is also thankful for the opportunity to share our support for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and to respectfully encourage funding for one crucial item missing from its budget - an Olmstead Coordinator.

Olmstead refers to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1999 landmark ruling known as *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which found that segregation of people with disabilities is discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Plaintiffs Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson, both living with developmental disabilities, were forcibly institutionalized after treatment for mental illness because their state lacked a community-based program as an alternative to institutionalization. The court ruled that states have a legal obligation to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to live, work, and receive services in the community in the least restrictive setting of their choosing. States demonstrate their intention to comply with the ADA and Olmstead ruling by developing Olmstead Plans. Plans are roadmaps. They help states assess the supply and demand of, and plan for, the resources needed to prevent the unnecessary institutionalization of people with disabilities.

It's thrilling that Rhode Island's first Olmstead Plan will be finalized in April 2025. We took a long and winding road to get here, but the state, community partners, Rhode Islanders with disabilities, and their family members have worked together over the past year to make this happen. EOHHS' current budget does not include funding to keep on staff its Olmstead Coordinator. We strongly believe that Rhode Island needs an Olmstead Coordinator to have a successful Plan. Without a coordinator, it will be difficult to keep up momentum, implement the plan, track progress and deliverables, and maintain ongoing community engagement. The Olmstead Coordinator has been responsible for organizing community listening sessions, one-on-one interviews, surveys, and Advisory Group meetings. The current Olmstead Coordinator has built trust and cultivated positive relationships with community members and people who live with disabilities, who often feel excluded from decision-making that affects them. It would be a shame to throw all that good will and



collaboration away. We respectfully request that this Finance Committee consider adding funding to keep the Olmstead Coordinator on staff at EOHHS.

Aside from Olmstead, MHARI fully supports funding for EOHHS. The agency oversees and successfully implements Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) across the state. It has also made great strides in the realm of health and human services workforce development. EOHHS partners with the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals on many of its initiatives, and it has been a key player in strengthening Rhode Island's continuum of care.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie-Marie Pisciotta". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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