



NARRAGANSETT SCHOOL SYSTEM

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Rhode Island House Health & Human Services Committee
RE: Support of H7875
March 19, 2024

Dear Honorable Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

During the Summer of 2022, I first learned about the role of a community health worker (CHW). Narragansett School System partnered with the Washington County Coalition for Children (WCCC) and Thundermist to offer teletherapy to our middle and high school students during the school day. This two-year pilot project was grant-funded through the van Beuren Charitable Foundation (vBCF). The sustainability plan after the grant included Medicaid reimbursements to support the CHW role. Unfortunately due to the students participating having private insurance, this funding source was not actualized. This has left both Narragansett and Thundermist scrambling to develop a plan so that the services do not have to come to an end for our students this June.

The role of the CHW has been key to bridging the medical and educational partners together to meet the clinical needs of our students and families. Due to the role of a CHW having a medical background, she can work with pediatricians, the assigned therapist, and family to make sure that the right services are provided. She also meets with families to screen for other needs and makes connections within our community to resources.

The passage of this bill will open up the opportunity for our school district and others to become creative with how we partner with outside clinical programs to offer high-quality therapy sessions during a time when therapists are available. A student who is seeking outside therapy is often placed on a waiting list due to no available appointments during hours outside of the school day; however, those same therapists often have vacant appointments during the day. Using the CHW as the bridge between the school and therapist has allowed students to access much-needed mental health support within 2 weeks of referral.

Passage of H7875 will allow employers of CHWs to seek reimbursement for these services from private insurance. Funding can be an obstacle to thinking outside of the box to solve our children's mental health crisis. The passage of bill H7875 will use CHWs to build bridges to connect services to the students and families who are in need.

Sincerely,
Melissa Denton
Dr. Melissa Denton
Director of Student Services
Narragansett School System

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