



March 19, 2025

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chair  
House Health and Human Services Committee  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support for H5432**

Chair Donovan and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H5432, which would prohibit health insurance providers from requiring preauthorization for in-network mental health or substance use disorder services

My name is Sandy Valentine, and I am the Executive Director of RI Communities for Addiction Recovery Efforts (RICARES), based in downtown Providence. RICARES, is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by addiction. At RICARES, we provide a range of services aimed at promoting recovery and reducing the stigma surrounding substance use disorders. Our programs include peer support groups, educational workshops, advocacy efforts, and community outreach initiatives.

As a recovery community organization serving individuals and families affected by substance use disorders and mental health conditions, we witness daily the devastating consequences of delayed treatment. When people make the courageous decision to seek help, they deserve immediate access to care, not bureaucratic barriers that delay or deny crucial services during their moment of readiness.

**The Current Preauthorization Process Harms Those Seeking Recovery**

The current preauthorization requirements:

1. Create life-threatening delays in accessing critical care when individuals are at their most vulnerable
2. Place excessive administrative burdens on providers, reducing their capacity to deliver direct services
3. Deter many individuals from seeking treatment due to complex and frustrating authorization processes
4. Disproportionately impact those with limited resources who cannot navigate complex insurance systems
5. Contradict medical necessity when healthcare professionals have already determined treatment is appropriate

**Time Is of the Essence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment**

For those struggling with addiction and mental health challenges, the window for intervention can be narrow. When someone reaches out for help, immediate access to treatment can mean the difference between recovery and continued suffering—or even death. The current preauthorization process can take days or weeks, during which individuals may:

133 Mathewson Street, Providence, RI 02903  
office: (401) 475-2960 web: <https://ricares.org>



- Experience worsening symptoms
- Return to substance use
- Lose motivation to engage in treatment
- Face hospitalization for preventable crises
- Die from overdose or suicide

### **Economic and Social Benefits**

Eliminating preauthorization barriers will:

- Reduce overall healthcare costs through earlier intervention
- Decrease emergency department visits and hospitalizations
- Lower long-term disability claims related to untreated conditions
- Enable more individuals to return to productive employment and family roles
- Alleviate strain on community resources, criminal justice, and social service systems

### **Insurance Parity in Practice, Not Just Policy**

While the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act was intended to ensure equal coverage for mental health and substance use disorders, preauthorization requirements have remained a significant barrier to actualizing this parity. H5432 represents a concrete step toward ensuring that individuals seeking mental health and addiction treatment receive the same immediate access to care as those with physical health conditions.

### **Our Community's Experience**

In our recovery community, we regularly support individuals who have returned to use or abandoned their treatment plans due to insurance denials or delays. These are not merely statistics—they are our neighbors, family members, and friends whose lives depend on timely access to appropriate care.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support H5432. This legislation will save lives, reduce healthcare costs, and bring us closer to true parity in how we treat mental health and substance use disorders.

Thank you for your consideration. We are available to provide additional information or testimony regarding the impact of preauthorization requirements on our recovery community.

Sincerely,

Sandy Valentine, LCSW, RCP-F, CPRS  
Executive Director