



March 18, 2025

House Committee on Health and Human Services  
Rhode Island State House  
[HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov)

Re: **Testimony SUPPORTING House Bill 5619**, to increase public awareness, education, and outreach regarding brain health and dementia

Dear Chair Donovan and honorable members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of House Bill 5619.

ABC-RI stands for the rights and interests of all Rhode Islanders residing in long-term care facilities, and supports measures to prevent and postpone the necessity of such facilities for individual Rhode Islanders. SB481 is a crucial step toward addressing Rhode Island's growing dementia crisis, particularly for those at risk of needing long-term care. Right now, many Rhode Islanders experiencing early memory issues are not getting the help they need—more than 10% of adults aged 45 and older report signs of cognitive decline, yet only half have discussed their symptoms with a healthcare provider. This gap in awareness and diagnosis means that many individuals are missing opportunities to take action early, when lifestyle changes and new treatments can have the most impact. **By ensuring that people receive clear information about brain health and risk reduction, this bill empowers individuals to take control of their health before dementia progresses to the point where long-term care becomes necessary.**

The financial burden of dementia is already enormous, with Medicaid spending on Alzheimer's and related dementias exceeding \$470 million in Rhode Island. These costs will only rise as the state's population ages, but investing in early detection and prevention strategies can help slow this trajectory. Research shows that up to 40% of dementia cases may be linked to modifiable risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes, and physical inactivity. SB481 supports efforts to integrate brain health awareness into existing healthcare programs, helping Rhode Islanders take proactive steps to reduce their risk. By catching cognitive decline early and encouraging healthier lifestyles, this bill has the potential to reduce not just the personal toll of dementia but also the long-term financial strain on families and the state.

One of the most pressing concerns for individuals and families facing a dementia diagnosis is the potential need for long-term care. Without early detection and intervention, many people reach a point where they can no longer live independently. However, early diagnosis allows for the use of new FDA-approved treatments that can slow disease progression, giving individuals more time to maintain their daily routines. Additionally, lifestyle changes such as improved diet, exercise, and cognitive engagement have been shown to help delay symptoms. These proactive measures can extend the time

people are able to live at home, reducing the immediate demand for nursing home placements and easing the emotional and financial burden on families.

Beyond benefiting individuals, SB481 also strengthens Rhode Island's healthcare system by ensuring that providers are equipped with the latest tools and knowledge for early detection and care planning. It encourages the use of validated cognitive assessments, keeps providers informed about Medicare billing options for dementia-related care, and prepares the system for new and emerging treatments. By leveraging existing healthcare resources, this bill offers a cost-effective way to improve outcomes while also helping to postpone or even prevent the need for long-term care. Investing in brain health today means giving Rhode Islanders the best chance at a healthier, more independent future.

Thank you for your time and attention, and for all of your work on behalf of all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Gerard,  
ABC-RI