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March 18, 2025

House Committee on Health & Human Services

Rhode Island General Assembly

State House

Providence, RI

RE: Support for H.B. 6061– Insurance Coverage for Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders

Dear Chairwoman Donovan, Chairman Giraldo, and Chairman Potter; Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services,

I am writing to express my support for H.B. 6061, which seeks to strengthen insurance coverage for mental health and substance use disorder treatment in Rhode Island.

As a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker with 25 years of experience who previously lived in Rhode Island, I worked in countless nursing homes, emergency rooms, and in patients' homes all over the Southcoast.

I currently provide tele-mental health treatment to Rhode Islanders, many of whom face significant barriers to accessing the care they need due to restrictive insurance policies.

Ensuring that mental health and substance use disorder treatments are covered equitably—without financial or administrative barriers that **do not** exist for other medical conditions—is not just a matter of fairness but of public health necessity.

Mental health conditions and substance use disorders are medical conditions, and ought to be treated as such. Too often, patients face delays, denials, or prohibitive costs when seeking care, leading to worsening symptoms, crises, and even preventable deaths.

I especially commend the bill's provisions that:

- Prohibit insurers from imposing more restrictive financial requirements or treatment limitations on mental health and substance use care than on medical/surgical care.

- Ensure that clinical criteria used by insurers reflect generally accepted standards of care rather than arbitrary or profit-driven modifications.
- Require coverage for medication-assisted treatment and non-opioid pain management alternatives, which are crucial in addressing Rhode Island's ongoing opioid crisis.

Rhode Islanders should not have to fight insurance providers for the care they deserve. Passing this legislation will bring us one step closer to true parity in mental health and it will save lives in the process.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to support H.B. 6061 and advocate for its swift passage.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Williams MSW, LCSW, LICSW, LISW-CP