

27 March 2025

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan
Chair, House Committee on the House Health & Human Services
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: In Support of House Bill 5849

Dear Chair Donovan and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

I, Dannie Ritchie, a Professor of Family Medicine and a Health Equity Zone (HEZ) advocate, write in support of Representative Teresa Tanzi House Bill 5849.

I am additionally the lead in the non-profit organization, Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island. We work to promote policy and programs that will address the structural issues that lead to health differences in health outcomes here in Rhode Island. The organization was established in 2011, the year that the Commission on Health Advocacy and Equity was established in statute under the Rhode Island Department of Health, and we advocated for, though our work extends back to 2003. The Commission is to measure, create benchmarks and interventions to act on many disparate outcomes in our Rhode Island community. One of the functions is to promote the diversification of the health workforce such as increasing the community health worker (CHW) workforce. Many are employed by Health Equity Zones (HEZ).

The establishment HEZs created organizations that concretely address and take action to improve our communities' health and health outcomes. Again, they employ CHWs, the people that support communities' needs and priorities from housing to food security to domestic violence. It definitively puts action into addressing Rhode Island communities' health and social needs. The fact that a statutory directive does not exist is troubling as the good produced by these organizations needs to be an integral part of our state's infrastructure. To address some of the biggest challenges in our community improves health for us all.

I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically support the passage of House Bill 5849.

Most sincerely,



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