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To: House Health & Human Services Committee  
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition (email: [protectrihealth@gmail.com](mailto:protectrihealth@gmail.com))  
Date: March 26, 2025  
Re: **SUPPORT H5849 – The RI Equity Zone Act**

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a goal to protect, improve, and expand equitable access to quality, person-centered, affordable health care for all.

The Coalition **supports House Bill H5849** which would establish the state's Health Equity Zones as the Rhode Island Equity Zone (RIEZ) network, a formal program within the Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS).

Targeting the root causes of poor health and health disparities is challenging. But, the unique structure of Rhode Island's health equity zones – each a collaboration bringing together residents, non-profits, health care providers, businesses, and government agencies within a specific community – contributes to change. **Whether working to address food security, education, healthcare, environment, housing, or economic stability, RI Equity Zones are showing real results** through reduced rates of chronic disease, drops in measures of social vulnerabilities, and a reduction in the average per-person public healthcare costs for those who live in a RI Equity Zone (RIEZ) community.<sup>1</sup>

The RI Equity Zone (RIEZ) model is an important contributor to building a healthy and resilient Rhode Island by investing in communities and their capacity to affect change; by honoring the expertise of those who live and work in those communities; and by challenging the systems and structures that perpetuate health inequities.

**We must preserve and build on this nationally recognized and impactful model by formalizing the RIEZ network within EOHHS.** We urge your support.

Thank you.

**Protect Our Healthcare Coalition partners include:** Economic Progress Institute, RIPIN, Mental Health Association RI, RI Health Center Association, Latino Policy Institute, Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone (CPO-HEZ), United Way of Rhode Island, Senior Agenda Coalition RI, RI Medical Society, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, RI Community Food Bank, RI Psychological Association, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), National Association of Social Workers RI Chapter, The Womxn Project, Advocates for Better Care

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nam.edu/product/building-health-equity-zones/>