

March 27, 2025

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan

Chair, House Health and Human Services Committee

Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Support for HB 5849 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Office of Health and Human Services

Dear Chair Donovan and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Rachelle Hyson, and I am the Logistics and COVID-19 Response Lead for the Woonsocket Health Equity Zone. I am here today as a representative of the Rhode Island Equity Zone network, currently known as the Health Equity Zones. This network is made up of 14 different community-led collaboratives across the state of Rhode Island that strengthen the health & well-being of residents by addressing underlying racial and economic inequities. As a representative of this network, I urge you all to vote in favor of the Rhode Island Equity Zone Act- House Bill 5849, sponsored by....

Last year, our network was not fully funded in the Governor's budget, and for the first time since our Zones were established, we had to come together to advocate for sustainable funding. This became an opportunity for us to proudly share what we do and why our work is important.

This year, we are doubling down on this effort. Building on the lessons we learned last year, we are now also advocating for the passage of HB5849, which would codify this network into law and move its oversight under EOHHS. This move would better support the wide-ranging work we do in these Zones beyond simply improving health.

We are in a time where there are threats to defund initiatives that explicitly name the importance of equity, a value that asks us to address root causes of disparities rather than just treating the symptoms. Now is the time to support the health, well-being and prosperity of all Rhode Islanders by passing House Bill 5849.

Thank you Representative Donovan and the House Committee of Health and Human Services for your time and consideration.

Signed,

Rachelle Hyson, Woonsocket HEZ