

Testimony in Support HB 5623

Date: April 1, 2025

Chairperson Donovan, Members of the HHS Committee,

My name is Greg Doucette, and I am a Physical Therapist and Orthopedic Clinical Specialist. I live and practice in Warwick. I am also a member of the RI chapter of the American Physical Therapy Association and serve as the Chairperson of our Legislative Affairs Committee. I would like to begin by thanking this committee for the opportunity to discuss my vehement support for H 5623. I also want to thank Representative McGaw for introducing and supporting this valuable piece of legislation, concerning a very important issue that currently limits access to quality health care for the people of Rhode Island.

The prior authorization process, though created to reduce costs, has evolved into a system that results in delayed care, elevated risk for patients, and ultimately potential increases in downstream costs, all for little benefit. Like many health interventions, Physical Therapy care is most effective when it is administered in a timely and consistent manner. Moreover, research shows that when Physical Therapy is administered appropriately, it provides huge cost savings to the health care system. For instance, the average cost savings for one episode of care for a patient with Knee osteoarthritis is \$14,000 (resource provided). For carpal tunnel syndrome, those savings rise to nearly \$40,000 per episode! The delay of care undermines the potential for these savings, and thus the insurance company contention that that prior authorization systems help them keep costs low. Moreover, considering over 90% of denials are overturned on appeal, the process potentially does more harm, by increasing downstream cost, than good by reducing short-term costs. Put simply, the prior authorization system does more harm than good.

I currently have a patient who is 79 years old and a stroke survivor with right side hemiparesis and contractures in both hands. We are trying to improve his strength, balance and hand function so he will be safe to walk in his home and able to manipulate the cane that would help him navigate his community. As you can imagine, his symptoms make him a significant fall risk, which we are reducing with training. Despite these conditions, and the obvious need for continued care, this patient was denied authorization for future visits last week. I have set up multiple phone call windows to have a peer-to-peer review to appeal this decision but have not received a call during those times. I believe our appeal will be successful eventually because the patient has an obvious need for further interventions. In the meantime, however, he has been forced to miss both of his PT appointments this week. This delay stagnates progress, and in a patient with his comorbidities, significantly increases his risk of regression, potentially falling, and further downstream costs. Perhaps most nonsensical, this situation is occurring because of a decision made by an individual who has never seen, touched, or spoken to this patient.

The introduction of prior authorization practices in health care were originally designed to ensure appropriate utilization of provider services. Despite this noble goal, the processes have evolved into a bureaucratic behemoth that create a significant barrier to patients accessing timely, essential interventions. Those delays put patients at risk and often result in the need for more expensive medical care like surgery, hospital stays, and long-term care, not to mention the personal cost of lost

work, family burden, pain and suffering. H 5623 will serve as a vital mitigation tool that will maintain appropriate oversight but reduce the burdensome obstacles to care that the current system promotes. I urge you to pass it.

Thank you for your consideration of H 5623. If you have any questions regarding this legislation, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I look forward to working with this legislative body further to advocate for the health needs of Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely

Greg Doucette, PT, MPT

Rhode Island Physical Therapy Association Legislative Chair

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