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Testimony Re: House Bills 6119 and 5255 - The Rhode Island Health Care Reform Act of 2004 - Health Insurance Oversight

House Health & Human Services Committee

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that help babies and young children get off to the right start.

We strongly support House Bill 6119 and House Bill 5255 which would require an urgent review of primary care reimbursement rates. House Bill 6119 would include primary care services under the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner's purview and give OHIC the ability to analyze and recommend changes to primary care financing, including Medicaid, commercial insurance, and Medicare, through fee-for-service reimbursement, shared savings programs, capitation, specialized payment mechanisms for community health centers, quality bonuses, and care management funding, and any other relevant mechanisms, and require a review of primary care reimbursement rates in 2026. House Bill 5255 would require a primary care rate review in 2025.

Families across the state are struggling to find primary care providers for their children due to a shortage of pediatric health care providers that will continue to worsen. Less than half of pediatric primary care offices in Rhode Island are accepting new patients. Of the approximately 260 pediatricians currently providing primary care in RI, over a quarter are planning to retire in the next 6 years. The remaining practices will be unable to make up for this deficit in providers, leaving children with limited access to primary care pediatricians. **Without addressing primary care reimbursement rates, it will remain difficult to attract pediatric primary care providers to Rhode Island.**

Primary care for children is vital and yet remains underfunded. Medicaid is the primary funding source for pediatric care. **Over half (54%) of children ages 0-18 are covered by Medicaid. Rhode Island's Medicaid payment rates are 25% lower than neighboring states.** Pediatric primary care providers nationally are paid less than other kinds of primary care providers by all insurers, despite having the same or more training, [according to an article in Time Magazine](#).

Rhode Island needs to analyze and update pediatric primary care reimbursement rates to begin addressing the pediatric primary care crisis. The number of primary care pediatricians will continue to decline as pediatricians retire, and the low Medicaid reimbursement rates compared to neighboring states will exacerbate the shortage: Half of Rhode Island's children are covered by Medicaid, and Rhode Island's Medicaid reimbursement rates are lower than neighboring states.

The Department of Health indicated that “burnout in the field, an aging workforce, and the appeal of other specialties in medicine,” are some of the factors contributing to the primary care pediatrics shortage, [according to a recent report from WPRI](#). The challenges families are currently facing finding pediatric health care will only get worse without decisive action. Children will likely miss out on receiving their routine preventive pediatric care and screenings. Families will have to turn to urgent care centers and hospital emergency rooms when their children experience routine illnesses.

Pediatric primary care investments in children’s health produce improved outcomes even in subsequent generations. We all pay the long-term costs when children do not get what they need to thrive. We strongly urge you to act and give OHIC the ability to analyze and recommend changes to primary care financing and to require that this review be completed as soon as possible. These bills represent a step toward better access to pediatric primary care for Rhode Island children, as well as all Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.