

2/13/24

Re: Testimony in Support of H7171

Dear Chairperson Corvese and members of the House Labor Committee:

I am Dr. Elizabeth Brannan, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist in East Providence, RI. I am hopeful you are receiving testimony from people from a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives, and I would like to add my voice as it relates to better supporting children's mental health.

For the past 9 years, I have worked in a day hospital program for children and teens with severe anxiety disorders, all of whom struggle to attend school and/or function in basic parts of their daily lives. I have witnessed firsthand the difficulties many of our families experience while attempting to support their child in receiving necessary treatment through our program while maintaining the financial ability to support their families' basic needs.

I support House Bill 7171 because it will be an important step in providing adequate financial support to caregivers who must take time out of work to ensure their children can receive life changing mental health treatment. Anxiety disorders affect approximately 20% of children and teens in our country at some point in their lives, and untreated anxiety can lead to significant difficulties over time, including depression, substance use, suicidality, and reduced job prospects and earnings, among others. Fortunately, the research is clear that anxiety disorders are highly treatable, but unfortunately, many children cannot access effective treatments. One reason we hear frequently in our program for difficulties with access is that families want to enroll their children in our program or another similar treatment, but they cannot afford to take the time off of work that would be required to bring them to and from the program and participate in the necessary family therapy and/or home visit sessions. Every week we are working to secure gas and grocery store gift card donations to support families who are barely making ends meet while participating in our program, and we know there are many more who never walk through our doors because they do not have the financial privilege to do so. Expanding the scope of individuals who could receive coverage to better reflect the diversity of families in our state and increasing the amount of paid leave could significantly improve families' abilities to take the necessary steps in adequately supporting their children's mental health when needed.

I urge you to vote in favor of Bill H7171.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to be heard. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Brannan, MD
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