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Testimony Re: S-2072 – Psychiatry Resource Network Funding Act

**Senate Health and Human Services Committee
 March 19, 2024
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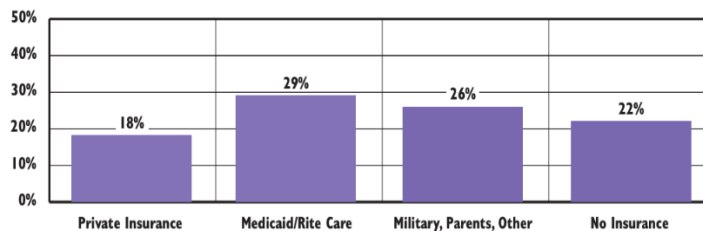
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign would like to voice its strong support for Senate Bill 2072. This bill would establish sustainable funding for the Psychiatry Resource Network programs in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island’s Psychiatry Resource Networks, MomsPRN and PediPRN, provide same-day clinical teleconsultation services and mental health referral for providers of pregnant and postpartum women (MomsPRN) and for primary care providers of children and adolescents (PediPRN). These programs support Rhode Island health care providers by offering same-day specialized clinical consultations and resource/referral services related to mental health, enabling health care providers to provide comprehensive care for their patients more promptly and avoid lengthy wait times for specialized care.

As of 2024, these two PRN programs have provided support to over 3,750 pediatric and perinatal patients and have received over 4,000 calls from over 1,000 different providers at 339 practices in the state. These programs help increase access to behavioral health services by building the capacity and knowledge of frontline and primary care workers and help support a comprehensive and coordinated behavioral health system of care in Rhode Island.

Behavioral and Mental Health Needs Among Moms and Children

Depression During or After Most Recent Pregnancy by Insurance Status, Rhode Island, 2018-2020

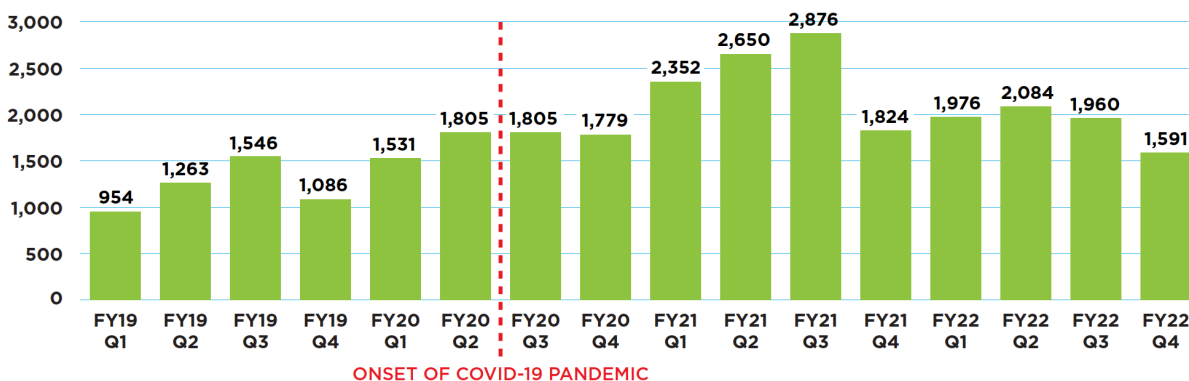


Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), 2018-2020.

In Rhode Island between 2018 and 2020, 29% of women with Medicaid/RIte care experienced depression symptoms during or after their most recent pregnancy, compared to only 18% of women with private insurance.

Prenatal and postpartum mental health screening, evaluation, and treatment is extremely important to new parents as they navigate the responsibilities of being a new parent and looking after an infant. Symptoms often interfere with a mother’s ability to care for herself and/or her child. Studies have consistently shown that poor maternal mental health is associated with lower quality of maternal-infant bonding. Improving low-income parents’ coverage and access to health care is critically important to supporting healthy infants and children. Ensuring women have access to proper mental health resources during the prenatal and postpartum period is important for identifying preventable health conditions, including maternal depression.

KIDS’ LINK CALLS, RHODE ISLAND, FY 2019 THROUGH FY 2022



Source: Lifespan, FY 2019 through FY 2022. Note: Q1 October–December, Q2 January–March, Q3 April–June, Q4 July–September.

- In FY 2021, there were 9,702 calls to Kids’ Link RI, twice the number of calls received in FY 2019 (4,849), prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of calls peaked in FY 2021, but remain higher in FY 2022 than prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²



While mental health challenges for youth existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant increase in anxiety and depression among youth of all ages since 2020. An already inadequate and struggling system of care for children’s behavioral health has been further stressed and overwhelmed by the pandemic. The number of calls to Kids’ Link RI, our state’s behavioral health triage service and referral network, doubled during the pandemic. Nationally, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, suicide attempts among adolescents had increased with sharper increases among girls and young women than among males.

In 2021 in Rhode Island, 521 teens ages 13 to 19 were admitted to the emergency department after a suicide attempt and 325 teens ages 13 to 19 were hospitalized after a suicide attempt.

Mental health is an important part of physical health, and the continuum of care should focus on prevention and promotion of mental health and wellness strategies as well as the treatment of mental health diagnoses at all ages. Mental health conditions impact our youngest children as well. **The number of young children enrolled in Medicaid presenting with a Serious Emotions Disturbance (SED) has grown from 12% in 2017 to 20% in 2022.**

Rhode Island needs a comprehensive continuum of mental health care for children and adolescents in Rhode Island that goes beyond high-end crisis/emergency room treatment and offers the right care at the right time in the right place. Systems connected to youth mental health needs include primary care/pediatrician offices, schools, community organizations, child welfare programs, and child care centers. Collaboration across these sectors is crucial to ensuring that children and adolescents have access to mental health care services and support when they need it.

While early diagnosis and access to care is critical in addressing mental health conditions, there is a significant shortage of specialized mental health providers, often resulting in long waitlists. As a result, much of the burden for initial mental health care falls on frontline clinicians, such as primary care and obstetric providers.

Pediatricians and other primary care providers are trusted by families and play a crucial role in addressing child and adolescent mental health needs, including promoting positive mental well-being. These providers are often the first point of contact between families and mental health services, help identify early signs of mental health, and provide direct care as well as referrals to other more specialized services.

They must navigate a complex and overtaxed system to connect their patients with the proper specialized mental health services. **Moms and children need the right care, at the right time, in the right place. Senate Bill 2072 would help ensure that these key mental health resources and services for moms and children continue to be supported at a time when they are severely needed.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.