



LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

Hearing Scheduled this **Tuesday, April 2nd**

Your Action & Advocacy Needed Again!

Your help is needed **AGAIN** at the **Senate Hearing** this week as we work to pass legislation that will **require private insurers to cover needed community health worker and youth mobile crisis services**. This legislation will help develop and sustain 2 important youth mental health efforts in Washington County and across RI:

- 1) *School-Based Tele-Behavioral Health Services*
- 2) *Youth Mobile Crisis Services*

The House bills were heard on March 19th, but strong testimony is also needed in the Senate to promote their passage. [S2606](#) (*Sponsored Senator DiMario*) requires private insurers to cover the services of community health workers currently billable to Medicaid, including: *health and promotion coaching, health education and training, health system navigation and resource coordination services, care planning and follow-up care recommendations*. Currently, these services are not billable to private insurance. While Community Health Workers (CHWs) provide vital support services to patients, communities, and the healthcare system, their services are largely paid for by grants and Medicaid billing alone. This is the case with the CHW who coordinates our School-Based Tele-Behavioral Health Program in Narragansett School System, a pilot program/promising model the Coalition hopes to expand to other school districts in the future. However, funding CHW positions through grants and Medicaid billing is not a sustainable funding strategy. In fact, **numerous federal and foundation grants that are funding CHWs in RI are due to expire this year and will result in the loss of many CHW positions statewide**. While this legislation will not totally sustain CHW services, private insurance reimbursement is an important first step in the funding solution.

[S2607](#) (*Sponsored by Senator DiMario*) requires private insurers to **cover the costs for youth mobile crisis response and stabilization services**. The federal *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020* not only established 9-8-8 as the national suicide prevention hotline, but set out the framework for a behavioral health crisis response system & the means to pay for it (*through a fee on phone services like 9-1-1*). The vision of this new national crisis system is that throughout the U.S., people in crisis of all ages would have



Someone to Call

(24/7 Hotline via call, text, chat)



Someone to Respond

(Mobile Crisis Services)



A Safe Place to Be

(Crisis Stabilization Services)

Emergency Depts. with their fast pace and focus on critically ill patients are not the place for children in emotional distress to obtain behavioral health care. The mere presence of police and fire/ambulance response can also be anxiety producing for children in crisis. Yet, these have become our 'de facto' responses in the U.S. **Behavioral health crises require a behavioral health response** and that means responses with **behavioral health clinicians** who can de-escalate crisis situations, conduct on-site assessments, provide crisis intervention counseling, and provide follow-up individual & family treatment and support for 6-8 weeks. EOHS has implemented a successful pilot of Youth Mobile Response & Stabilization Services with Tides Family Services and Family Service of RI. Since the program launched in northern RI in Nov. 2022, the program has served 701 youth between the ages of 3 and 20. **92% have been stabilized and diverted from local Emergency Depts. State funding for this highly successful and cost effective pilot ends in Sept. 2024**. Programs like this should not be reliant upon grants and Medicaid for sustainability. Crisis services should be part of the continuum of care covered by all insurance carriers (*as with physical injuries*). Eight states have passed similar legislation requiring private insurers to pay for mobile crisis services including: California, New Jersey, New York, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

What Can You Do to Help?

1. **Write a Letter (Email)** to members of the **Senate Health & Human Services Committee & Senate Leadership** (names & emails below) supporting **S2606** or **S2607**. Send your letters by 3 PM on the hearing date and be sure to send a copy to the committee clerk, Robin Dionne (401-222-2381) at Slegislation@rilegislature.gov so your letter is put in the public record.

If you live in the district of one of the Committee members, send a personal letter to them as a constituent.

Keep these things in mind when writing letters to legislators:

- ▶ Send **separate letters for each bill** you are supporting.
- ▶ Letters can be **brief & should be no longer than 1 page**. Place on your letterhead if from an organization.
- ▶ Address the letter this way
To: Senate Health & Human Services Committee
From: Your Name & Organization (if any)
Date: April 2, 2024 (Hearing Date)
RE: Support for SXXX (list 2606 or 2607 here)
- ▶ Begin with a statement about why you are writing and reiterate your position. Example:
I am writing to urge you to support S2606 to require private insurers to pay for CHW services.
- ▶ Next, write about **who you are and what you/your organization does**.
- ▶ Explain **why you believe this bill is important** and give some examples or share data if appropriate. Tell a brief story about a real situation in RI that is relevant and how this legislation would make a difference.
- ▶ Conclude your letter with a recommendation that they vote to approve this bill.

Senate Health & Human Services Committee		
Senator Josh Miller, Chair	Cranston, Providence	sen-miller@rilegislature.gov
Senator Bridget Valverde, Vice Chair	N. Kingstown, E. Greenwich, S. Kingstown	sen-valverde@rilegislature.gov
Senator Pamela J. Lauria	Barrington, Bristol, East Providence	sen-lauria@rilegislature.gov
Senator Alana M. DiMario	Narragansett, N. Kingstown, New Shoreham	sen-dimario@rilegislature.gov
Senator Elaine Morgan	Hopkinton, Charlestown, Exeter, Richmond, W. Greenwich	sen-morgan@rilegislature.gov
Senator Linda L. Ujifusa	Portsmouth, Bristol	sen-ujifusa@rilegislature.gov
Senate Leadership		
Senator Dominick Ruggiero, President	Providence, North Providence	sen-ruggiero@rilegislature.gov
Senator Ryan Pearson, Majority Leader	Cumberland, Lincoln	sen-pearson@rilegislature.gov
Senator Jessica de la Cruz, Minority Leader	North Smithfield, Burrillville, Glocester	sen-delacruz@rilegislature.gov
Senator Valerie Lawson, Majority Whip	East Providence	sen-lawson@rilegislature.gov

2. **Attend the Senate Committee Hearing** at the **State House** in the **Senate Lounge** on **Tuesday, April 2nd** beginning **at the Rise**. Best to arrive by 4 PM. The timing of hearings is always unpredictable. Prepare for a long night. The Agenda for the hearing can be found [here](#). Sign-up sheets to testify are usually posted on a table outside the hearing room. Susan Orban, Coalition Director, will be attending the hearing and can assist anyone coming to the hearing. Contact her at wccc@washcokids.org or 401-626-7529 and she can meet you. Testimony is generally limited to 3 minutes per person. General Assembly members appreciate hearing from constituents & working people on issues, especially in this committee. They will welcome testimony from CHWs and medical providers. Ample free parking can be found in the RI Dept. of Health Parking Lot after 3 PM.

3. **Please share the Word about this Committee Hearing with Others Who Can Help Advocate for Passage!**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF OUR CHILDREN!