

Chairman DiPalma
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

May 4, 2023

RE: In support of Representative Casimiro's bill H5987

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Geneva Washington. I live in East Providence and am a constituent of Representative Dawson. I write in support of bill H5987 which would increase Medicaid rates for human resource codes by 10%.

I am, and have been, a Family Preservation specialist with the Project Connect program at Children's Friend for 9 years. Project Connect provides home-based services for families statewide identified by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Project Connect is the only program in the state that works with DCYF to keep children safe and strengthen families by helping parents achieve a substance-free lifestyle. The program is intensive, home-based, and provides services for an average of 15 months. Our services impacted approximately 337 individuals last year and 249 so far this year (these number reflect the total individuals impacted).

The Project Connect staff is specially trained in substance abuse and child welfare risk assessment and are extremely successful in reunifying families faster and helping them stay reunified. This saves the state of Rhode Island a significant amount by keeping children out of, or shortening their stay, in foster care.

I have seen first-hand how this program truly makes a significant difference in families' lives, and it should be known that Project Connect not only works with mothers, but also fathers. One example: After a lengthy struggle with substance abuse, one father we worked with was convicted of a crime and sentenced to eight years in prison and served two of them. During his time in prison, his son was born to a drug addicted mother. Upon his release, the father began working with Project Connect. Project Connect assisted him with getting employment and housing and worked with him on his sobriety. Following a period of sobriety and supportive counseling, Project Connected helped the father work through the reunification steps to gain custody of his son who had been in foster care since birth. Father and son were reunited eight months later with the assistance of Project Connect.

The program is funded through a Medicaid reimbursable code with a state match. DCYF has also been providing retention stipends to us to help keep us in field. But these jobs are hard work – going into people's homes and helping them with whatever may come up including SSI applications or medical appointments or drug treatment is not a regular desk job. We need good, qualified staff in order make this program work. As is true in other professions, we are having trouble hiring new staff. This 10% rate increase will help ensure that our current staff stays in the program, especially when those ARPA funded stipends end, and that we are able to hire more staff. The need is growing, not getting smaller post-COVID.

Please pass Representative Casimiro's bill H5987 so that we can continue to impact families lives through Project Connect.

Thank you,
Geneva Washington
10 Harvey Avenue, Riverside, RI 02915