



**Testimony Re: House Bill 7127, Department of Health Budget for FY27
House Finance Committee**

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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 their deep disappointment that the proposed budget for the Department of Health budget fails to include a key investment for Rhode Island children and families -- the PediPRN program.

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.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign oppose the proposed Department of Health budget, because it does not include sufficient funding to maintain the PediPRN program. The proposed budget does not include any state funding to operate the PediPRN program, or pediatric psychiatry resource network, which will result in this program having to close.

The proposed Rhode Island Department of Health Budget calls for \$750,278, which is enough to operate the maternal health psychiatry resource network, MomsPRN, but it does not include any funding for the pediatric psychiatry resource network. The PediPRN program has federal grant funding remaining to cover operations through the end of the federal fiscal year, but without state investment, the program will have to close this fall. **Rhode Island must invest \$630,000 for State Fiscal Year 2027 to maintain this valuable resource for our children and families.**

Rhode Island is [one of 49 states](#) with at least one pediatric mental/behavioral health resource network. Rhode Island's pediatric psychiatry resource network program is called PediPRN. PediPRN was launched in December 2016. **This teleconsultation programs allow providers, like family doctors and pediatricians, to provide comprehensive and timely care for their patients.** [It offers](#) same day specialized clinical consultations and resource/referral services for mental and behavioral health needs. As of September 2025, PediPRN has directly helped 3,001 pediatric patients in Rhode Island and has indirectly helped many more through health care provider support and training.

PediPRN helps connect children and families to timely diagnosis and care from their pediatrician or primary care provider rather than requiring them to start the process of navigating a complex and overtaxed mental health system when it is not necessary. It can be challenging to find support for pediatric mental health concerns. Children and parents must first identify that there is a need, find a provider, explain the problem, and then find appropriate treatment.

Here are a few important statistics related to the needs of pediatric patients:

- **More than one in four [Rhode Island children](#) between the ages of 3 and 17 has a diagnosable mental health problem, and nearly 1 in 10 children (9.8%) age 6 to 17 have significant functional impairment.**
- Children with undiagnosed or untreated mental illnesses are more likely to leave their education without a diploma, use drugs, or become incarcerated. It is estimated that [more than half](#) of justice-involved youth have a diagnosable mental health disorder.
- [In Rhode Island in 2022-2023](#), more than half (52%) of children aged 3 to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care.

PediPRN is free to all pediatric care providers in Rhode Island. This service supports clinicians and allows them to refer their patients to outpatient treatment, medical teleconsultation, specialist evaluations, care coordination, and intensive treatment. The pediatric teleconsultation line has reduced the burden on Rhode Island's psychiatric hospitals and the costs of providing high-end services by managing mental health conditions through primary care offices, rather than waiting until patients are in crisis. This program is vital to support Rhode Island children's mental health.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in the past for extending funding for the PRN programs. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly urge that you increase the Rhode Island Department of Health budget allocation for the psychiatric resource networks to include \$630,000 for FY27 to preserve the PediPRN program so children can get the mental health support they need.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



Right from the Start

Sustain RI's Psychiatry Resource Network (PRN) for Moms, Babies, and Children [H-8268](#) (Shallcross Smith) & [S-2562](#) (DiMario)



"It's the most reliable program that I have worked with in my twenty years of working in primary care." – Rhode Island Primary Care Provider

The need for pregnancy, postpartum, and pediatric access to mental health support is urgent and growing, with both a maternal and children's mental health crisis occurring. In Rhode Island, there is a shortage of specialized mental health providers. As such, much of the burden for initial mental health care falls on frontline primary health care providers, who do not have extensive training and must navigate a complex and overtaxed system to connect patients to care.

Rhode Island's MomsPRN and PediPRN programs help address this gap by empowering health care professionals, building competency, and increasing patient access to mental health care by offering frontline health care providers same-day, specialized clinical teleconsultations that include resource/referral support and ongoing professional education. **At least 28 states have a perinatal psychiatry access program. All but 1 state has a child psychiatry access program.**

Supports Health Care Professionals

As of September 2025, the PRN programs have helped 5,858 perinatal and pediatric patients by supporting 1,386 health care professionals at 486 practices across Rhode Island. The PRN programs offer same-day specialized clinical consultations and resource/referral services for mental health services. The program helps support primary health care providers to meet their patients' mental health care needs so they can avoid lengthy wait times for specialized care.

Supports Moms and Babies

RI MomsPRN has directly helped 2,857 perinatal patients in Rhode Island. Even more are benefiting from the program because with each call a provider makes, they gain knowledge to support other patients. More than one in four (27.5%) women in RI experience depression before, during, or after their pregnancy.

Supports Children

PediPRN has directly helped 3,001 pediatric patients in Rhode Island. Even more benefit from the program as pediatric health care providers gain knowledge to support other patients. In RI, nearly one in three children (30%) ages three to seventeen has a diagnosable mental health challenge.

The PRN 2026 bill will:

Permanently fund and sustain RI MomsPRN and PediPRN. The Governor's proposed budget has funding allocated for RI MomsPRN, but not PediPRN. Federal grant funding for PediPRN is scheduled to end in September 2026. If no funding is allocated, the PediPRN program will close.

