



JAMES L. MADARA, MD
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, CEO

ama-assn.org
t (312) 464-5000

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The Honorable John G. Edwards
House Majority Whip
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Representative Edwards:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physicians and medical student members, I write in support of House Bill 7974 (H7974), “An Act Relating to Insurance—Insurance Coverage for Mental Illness and Substance Abuse.” Rhode Island is already one of the nation’s leaders in working to ensure evidence-based coverage and care for patients with a mental illness and/or substance use disorder. We commend your continued leadership in working to enact policies to improve care and coverage for those with a mental illness or substance use disorder.

This bill wisely expands important protections for patients who seek and receive care in a residential or in-patient setting. Requiring use of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) criteria will provide important guidance for facilities given that the ASAM evaluation and placement criteria is well-established in the medical community, but not necessarily relied upon by health insurers or treatment centers. This requirement will help raise the bar for treatment centers to provide evidence-based care that patients and their families can trust.

The AMA further supports the extension of mental health and substance use disorder parity protections to enrollees in the Rhode Island Medicaid program, including Medicaid managed care organizations.

Finally, the AMA also supports provisions in H7974 that prohibit health plans from requiring prior authorization and concurrent utilization review for admission and the first 28 days of treatment, respectively. Prior authorization and concurrent utilization management when applied to patients seeking care for mental illness and substance use disorders has led to countless horror stories from patients and physicians who—while working to provide care—must devote emotional and financial resources to fighting health insurance companies. H7974 restores the focus on evidence-based care.

For these reasons, the AMA strongly supports H7974 and urges a “yes” vote.

If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954.

Sincerely,

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Rhode Island Medical Society