

Rate reviews are needed across human services**Your Turn****Louis P. DiPalma and Julie A. Casimiro****Guest columnists**

Imagine worrying about an elderly parent who is receiving far less care than their condition requires. Imagine worrying about a child or family member with an addiction problem because the support services they rely upon to survive are unavailable. And imagine the anxiety and fear of parents with children who have disabilities and who are on waiting lists for the services they need to thrive.

All of these scenarios are occurring daily for too many of our residents, and something needs to change.

Our health-care system is suffering a crisis of care that's only worsened due to the pandemic. Our system is understaffed and undersupported, and it is hurting our residents, particularly Rhode Island's most vulnerable.

With Medicaid reimbursement rates remaining stagnant for decades, Rhode Island is witnessing too many of our human service workers either leaving the state for better paying opportunities or abandoning their crucial jobs altogether in favor of more lucrative and less stressful jobs in a different field. This has become an even larger issue due to the stress and burnout brought about by the pandemic.

The need and demand for this workforce grows each year, and our efforts to ensure we can meet the needs of Rhode Island citizens must be urgent and robust. Failure to invest in the 'human infrastructure' will undermine our progress toward inclusive living within our communities for elders, children and adults with disabilities and mental health conditions. We have a once in a generation opportunity to do the right thing and make investments that ensure the industry can compensate their workers with middle class jobs that allow them to meet their basic needs and contribute to our local economies.

We have to stop the exodus of human services workers in our state, and we believe this is possible with the proper oversight of the rate setting process and appropriate reimbursement rate increases that accurately reflect the high level of care and dedication that our employees provide to our residents.

This solution can be found in the legislation (2022-S 2311, 2022-H 7180, 2022-S 2200, 2022-H 7489) we have introduced to rectify this serious problem that can and will affect every single resident of Rhode Island.

These bills will ensure that we conduct regular rate reviews to prevent us from reaching this point again. They will ensure we are investing in the care of Rhode Islanders, and in turn, that we are investing in our health and human services economy. For our providers, the people they serve, and the future of our state, it is imperative we act now.

In order to ensure the quality of care that our residents deserve, we encourage you over the coming weeks to voice your support for this legislation. Both of our bills will be heard by the Senate and House Finance committees soon, and your testimony, your stories and your experiences would be greatly beneficial to the success of this legislation.

Our patients, our residents and our dedicated workers deserve better. Help them by supporting consistent rate reviews for our human services.

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