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Patrick J. Kennedy Applauds Governor's Executive Order to Improve Access to Treatment for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

Kennedy calls for Rhode Island to continue to push for inclusion of behavioral health and medication visits as primary care visits

Woonsocket, RI / May 4, 2018 — Today, Patrick Kennedy praised Governor Gina Raimondo's Executive Order reaffirming and expanding Rhode Island's commitment to persons with mental health and substance use disorders while addressing access to timely and needed care. He joined the Governor, members of her cabinet, former colleagues Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and Congressman David Cicilline during a signing ceremony at the Patrick J. Kennedy Center for Primary Care at Thundermist Health Center in Woonsocket.

The Executive Order signed by the Governor raises the priority of mental health parity requiring all Rhode Island insurers to provide fair and timely access to behavioral health care services, better reporting and adequate providers in their networks. Additionally, state agencies will develop a strategic roadmap for improving both the adult and pediatric mental health systems, as well as launch a statewide conversation aiming to end the stigma of mental health and encourage all Rhode Islanders to seek treatment when needed.

Ending the first week of mental health awareness month, Kennedy joined the Governor for a listening session at Anchor Recovery in Pawtucket, with student assistance counselors and representatives from Anchor Learning Academy, the Youth Recovery Center and the Rhode Island Department of Education, to learn more about emotional wellbeing in Rhode Island schools.

Kennedy and Governor Raimondo also attended a meeting with college and university presidents and leaders, as well as representatives from the JED Foundation, to discuss mental health trends and needs on campuses, and learn more about innovative programs to support students.

"Thank you, Governor Raimondo, for your leadership on mental health parity. We need to make sure that everyone understands that their rights to insurance coverage for their behavioral health is equal to their coverage for medical care," said former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy. "Rhode Island is poised to be a national leader in mental health and emotional wellbeing. Legislative efforts to include behavioral health and medication maintenance visits as primary care visits will ensure residents get the care they need, when they need it."

Kennedy also met with House Speaker Nicholas Mattiello and Senate President Dominick Ruggerio to discuss the importance of mental health parity, holding insurance companies accountable and continuing to push for equal access and payment for behavioral health services for all Rhode Islanders.

Tomorrow, Kennedy will join Governor Raimondo in Portsmouth for a community conversation focused on the approaches to stem the tide of overdose deaths. They will also hear from residents how the community is coming together to address the crisis.

On Saturday evening, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Warwick, Kennedy will be inducted in the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame for his service to Rhode Island and his leadership as founder of two international mental health advocacy organizations. His wife Amy and their children Harper, Owen, Nora, and Nell will be in attendance.

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About Patrick J. Kennedy:

Former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.) is a lifelong mental health advocate and former member of the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis. He is the founder of The Kennedy Forum, a convening think tank tackling mental health and addiction issues and co-founder of One Mind, a global leader in open science collaboration for brain research. In 2015, he co-authored *A Common Struggle*, a New York Times best seller, which details his personal journey and provides a roadmap for the future of mental health policy. Mr. Kennedy is pushing for full enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. He was the lead sponsor of this groundbreaking legislation, which requires health plans cover mental health, eating disorder, and addiction care health benefits the same way they cover physical health benefits. To learn about Mr. Kennedy's efforts, please visit www.patrickjkennedy.net.