



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Governor McKee appoints United Way executive to lead Council on Behavioral Health

(March 13, 2023) — Governor Dan McKee has chosen Dr. Larry Warner, Chief Impact & Equity Officer at the United Way of Rhode Island, to serve as chairman of the Governor’s Council on Behavioral Health.

Warner brings extensive experience with public health, public policy, and strategic planning to this role, and as a former Providence firefighter and EMT, he also has hands-on experience with helping people in need.

“The work that the council does touches on so much of what we do, and that is why I am pleased to appoint Larry Warner to this leadership role,” McKee said. “We want to raise academic outcomes for children in schools, we want to raise people’s incomes, and we also want to make sure that people are healthy and can enjoy the benefits of those efforts. That is where physical health and mental health play a key role, and that is where this council plays a role, guiding us as we address our state’s behavioral health needs.”

Warner, who has a doctoral degree in health equity and social justice from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said he has long seen behavioral health as an area where he would like to contribute.

“Thinking back to my days as a first responder in the City of Providence and responding to drug overdoses and mental health crises, when people didn’t know where to turn, 911 served as a stopgap,” he said. “Serving on the council provides me an opportunity to convene government and community to inform and direct efforts to address substance use and mental health needs. I appreciate Governor McKee’s trust in me to chair this council and I look forward to serving alongside all of the people involved in this work.”

Warner succeeds Rich Leclerc, who with exception of a brief hiatus, had led the Governor’s Council on Behavioral Health since its creation in 2002.

Richard Charest, Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals, thanked Leclerc for his commitment and dedication to the cause of behavioral health during his years as council chairman and welcomed Warner to his new role.

“This is a momentous occasion for the council,” he said. “The leadership provided by people like Rich and Larry is vitally important as we work to transform the behavioral health system of care by eliminating stigma, ensuring parity between physical health and mental health issues, and improving the system overall, especially for our most vulnerable populations.”

The council reviews and evaluates the needs and challenges associated with Rhode Island's services for individuals with mental health and substance use conditions. It also encourages and monitors the development, coordination, and integration of these services. The council is made up of behavioral healthcare service providers, consumers of these services, their family members, individuals in recovery from mental illness or substance use conditions, behavioral healthcare advocates, and other interested parties.

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