



April 27, 2021

The Honorable Representative Joseph McNamara  
Chairman of the House Education Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5936, Trauma Informed Schools

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Committee:

The Mental Health Association is grateful for the opportunity to support House Bill 5936, which would implement trauma-informed practices in schools. We thank Representative Ranglin-Vassell for sponsoring this legislation.

According to Kids Count, in 2017 Rhode Island had “2,404 indicated investigations of child abuse and neglect involving 3,357 children. About half (52%) of the victims of child abuse and neglect in 2017 were young children under age six and one-third (34%) were ages three and younger.” Furthermore, according to the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Rhode Island’s rate of child victims increased 17.1% from 2014 to 2018.

We must prevent and reduce childhood trauma for the health and wellbeing of our young people. [Trauma Sensitive Schools](#) states that chronic stress and trauma alter a child’s developing brain, and this in turn affects the child’s “comprehension, memory, the ability to produce work, engagement in learning, and trust...and the ability to self-regulate attention, emotions, and behavior.” The Harvard Center on the Developing Child [defines Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) as physical, sexual and emotional abuse; neglect; a caregiver’s untreated

mental illness; and household violence. [Dr. Nadine Burke's engaging TED Talk](#) demonstrates that ACEs increase the risk of chronic disease and mental illness in adulthood. [Research](#) shows that, "The risk for developing a mental disorder after an ACE (in a dose-dependent manner) is highest for depression, PTSD, borderline personality disorder (BPD), and substance abuse."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the [CDC](#) has noted that ACEs have an "impact on future violence victimization and perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity."<sup>2</sup>

Trauma inflicted by one generation onto the next generation is a costly and preventable epidemic. Cultivating awareness about trauma in schools will go a long way toward preventing and treating ACEs. This is a worthy investment for the State of Rhode Island, and it will pay dividends into the future as we reduce and/or prevent physical and mental illnesses, crises, hospitalization, poor academic performance, reliance on public benefits, and violence with this legislation. A healthy citizenry costs less than a sick one.

Please click the blue links to review the referenced sources.

We respectfully urge you to pass this legislation. Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6131660/pdf/fpsy-09-00420.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>