

April 29, 2025

Chair Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support for H6045 (Social Worker Ratio)

Dear honorable chair and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Shannon McDonnell, and I'm writing today to express my deep and adamant support for House Bill 6045.

Around this time last year, I got the scariest call of my life from my dad. He called to let me know that my little brother, Patrick, who was eleven at the time, was suicidal and that he was taking him to the hospital. A social worker from Patrick's school had called home that afternoon, asking if his parents could come in to pick him up, that he'd mentioned in a one on one session that he'd been thinking of hurting himself.

I knew that he'd started isolating himself a lot more, but I thought it was just the usual pre-teen desire to play video games and avoid your family. Then I got this call. It broke me.

I learned that a few of the boys in my brother's class had approached their teacher that morning because they were worried about him. They were in a group chat together and he'd said some things the night before about feeling like no one liked him and feeling sad all the time. The teacher asked the social worker at the school to meet with him, and she was able to get him to open up.

I truly can't thank her enough. Not only did she support my family that day, but she was also there for us in the days and months to come when no other help seemed to be available. Patrick has a full time therapist now, but we were put on countless waiting lists before we found her. My dad and step-mom tried to get him in an outpatient program but was told by a there was no current availability, that it'd be a few months before an opening. While we waited for help to become available, the social worker at his school acted as his counselor. She let him stop by her office whenever his thoughts got especially dark, taught him coping skills to get through those really hopeless moments, and even gave us advice about how to manage his emotions at home. Without her I really don't know what we would have done.

I'm testifying today in support of House Bill 6045 because I know that if my brother and I lived in a different town, he might not have had this level of mental health support available to him. And that's horrifying. No child in crisis should have to wait for care.

It's clear that our community has a scarcity of mental health resources, and we owe it to our children to fight to fix that. Care as life-saving as this should be available and accessible to all young people who need it, not just those who live in the right district.

Thank you,

Shannon McDonnell