

May 19, 2025

In support of House Bill 5527

Dear Chairman Abney, Vice Chair Slater and Members of the House Finance Committee

My name is Kiana Labonte, and I am 17 years old. I am here today to share my story and why the Children's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program is so significant.

For years I struggled with anxiety and depression, constantly overstimulated and horrified of what my life has become. I was going through the most difficult time of my life, I felt alone, lost and hopeless, but the thought of getting help again seemed insufferable. Throughout those years of misery and distress, I experienced every type of assistance; partial programs, hospitalization and countless therapy appointments. But each and everyone of those strategies felt intimidating. So at my breaking point, after years of help I didn't know who I could turn to before I knew about mobile response.

That's when someone told my mom about the Mobile Response team. Within a short period of time, people came to my house-not in uniforms, not to take me away but actually listen. They didn't treat me like a chore or a charity case. I didn't feel insecure or intimidated and I felt like I had no expectations to meet. They greeted me with kind smiles, gentle hearts and open ears. They talked through how I was feeling and what I had been experiencing and made sure my family knew how to support me through this process as well. They continued to come back and check on me, helped me connect and made sure I didn't feel alone.

Because of MRSS, I didn't end up in the hospital again. I didn't have to deal with the stress of missing school or being away from my family. I got the assistance I needed but in the comfort of my own home. Receiving help in my own home made me feel safe and secure, not trapped and contained. I know now that if MRSS wasn't there, things could have gone quite differently for me.

There are thousands of kids in Rhode Island who are struggling just as I did. Not all of them have the courage to reach because the thought of hospitals and programs of that sort are truly scary. MRSS gave me hope when I was hopeless. Every kid deserves that.

I ask you to please support this bill so that no child has to go through a crisis alone or suffer in fear. I greatly appreciate you listening to my story and for making a difference in the lives of kids like me.

Sincerely,

Kiana Labonte