



TIDES FAMILY SERVICES

WE NEVER GIVE UP ON A KID... NEVER!

215 Washington St.
West Warwick
Rhode Island, 02893

Main Office - 401-822-1360

Fax - 401-823-4694

Tidesfs.org

May 20, 2025

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
State House
Providence, RI

RE: **Support for H5527**- Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) for Children and Youth

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of Tides Family Services, I am writing to express our strong support for H5527, the Children's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services Act. This critical legislation would establish a sustainable, statewide Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program to address the growing behavioral health crises faced by Rhode Island's children and youth.

Each day, children and adolescents in severe emotional distress come through our doors-many of whom do not need hospitalization, but rather immediate, community-based support. Unfortunately, due to a lack of alternative options, families often have no choice but to bring their child to the emergency room, even when it may not be the best setting for them.

The consequences of this are severe:

- Emergency rooms are overwhelmed with behavioral health cases, forcing long wait times for all patients.
- Children in crisis often wait days or even weeks for appropriate placement, leading to further emotional distress.
- Hospitals struggle with limited psychiatric beds, meaning that children who could have been stabilized at home end up boarding in the ER-often without receiving the care they truly need.

H5527 and its companion S0429 offer a proven solution: a statewide MRSS program.



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Since October 2022, Tides Family Services and Family Service of Rhode Island have deployed trained behavioral health professionals to respond directly to children in crisis- where they are, when they need it. Instead of relying on ERs, these children receive immediate de-escalation, crisis stabilization, and follow-up care in their home, school, or community.

MRSS is already making a difference:

- Over 1,300 children served statewide since October 2022.
- More than 90% successfully diverted from hospitalization.
- \$2.2 million saved in avoidable emergency room costs.

This program is working-but it is at risk. MRSS is currently funded through a time-limited federal grant. Without legislative action, families will once again be left with no viable options during their most vulnerable moments.

H5527 creates a sustainable path forward by requiring Medicaid coverage for MRSS and certifying providers statewide. It ensures Rhode Island meets EPSDT obligations and fulfills the intent of the DCYF Consent Decree while addressing systemic gaps in our behavioral health crisis response.

We strongly urge the General Assembly to support H5527 and S0429 so every child in Rhode Island has access to the right care at the right time-before an emergency room visit becomes their only option.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Tougas

VP of Development and Communications
Tides Family Services

Concerned resident who has witnessed their neighbor's son make several unproductive ER visits