

House Finance Committee

MRSS Bill- H5527

Good Evening Chairperson Abney and members of the committee.

My name is Nicole Ortiz and I am a Licensed Clinician within Family Service of Rhode Islands' Youth Mobile Response and Stabilization Service Program, also known as MRSS.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 5527 which would establish a statewide MRSS program that all Rhode Island's children would have access to.

I began as a case manager and grew into my role as a clinician within this team and have been working providing MRSS services for over 2 years now. During my tenure, I have experienced firsthand the immense impact that MRSS has on the communities and families who are not only impacted by their child's mental health crisis, but are also having to navigate services, insurances, payments, missing work and school, and other daily stressors - all of which accumulate to impact the families' mental health as a whole.

Prior to the MRSS initiative, if a youth were to have thoughts of suicide - families, schools and providers would send a youth to the emergency room, they would wait 5-6 hours to be seen by a medical provider, complete a safety checklist and sign a form that they are safe enough to relieve any liability on the adult caregivers. At no fault of any providers, this system would deter any youth from revealing their thoughts again due to the negative and insufficient experience and then they would be left to handle these thoughts on their own without support.

As both a case manager and a clinician, I have been able to meet these youth where they are at, support the families in mitigating risks by connecting to appropriate services and keeping youth out of the hospital by a 90% success rate. Parents report that they no longer feel alone and that the youth's trust in the systems have grown exponentially by having an experience that supports their mental health while respecting their privacy and independence.