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Dr. Stephanie Downey Toledo, Interim Superintendent

May 20, 2025

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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 the Central Falls School District, I respectfully urge your support for **H5527**, which would establish a sustainable, statewide **Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS)** program for children and youth experiencing behavioral health crises.

As advocates for Rhode Island families, we witness firsthand the urgent need for immediate, community-based crisis support—services that help children and caregivers navigate behavioral health challenges without relying on emergency rooms or law enforcement.

When a child is in crisis, families often have nowhere to turn. Too often, they are told to call 911—resulting in traumatic experiences for the child, fear and distress for the family, and unnecessary strain on emergency responders. Time and again, parents tell us they need someone to help them **in the moment**—at home, at school, or in the community—not hours or days later.

MRSS provides exactly that:

- A trained behavioral health team responds immediately to help de-escalate the situation and support the child and family.
- There **is** no need to involve law enforcement or emergency rooms, reducing trauma for all involved.
- Services are available **24/7**, so families are never left to manage a crisis alone.
- Follow-up support is provided **for** up to six weeks to stabilize the family and connect them to long-term care.

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This model works. Since October 2022, MRSS teams from Tides Family Services and Family Service of Rhode Island have served more than 1,300 children statewide, successfully diverting over **90%** from hospitalization. These interventions have kept children safe at home and in school, while saving the state millions in avoidable emergency care costs.

However, without permanent funding and statewide coordination, this critical service is at risk. No family should have to fight for access to care during their most vulnerable moments. Every child—regardless of zip code or insurance—deserves access to immediate, effective crisis support.

We strongly urge you to **support H5527** and invest in the future of Rhode Island's children. With MRSS, we can provide families with the right support at the right time—before a crisis becomes a tragedy.

Sincerely,

Patricia Martinez
Chief of Equity &
Empowerment Officer



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