

Rhode Island Chapter

INCORPORATED IN RHODE ISLAND

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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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,

As the pediatricians who provide the primary and specialty care for Rhode Island's children and adolescents, during our daily interactions with family members we see the growing crisis in pediatric behavioral health. Each day, children and adolescents in severe emotional distress come through our doors—many of whom are in crisis and need acute interventions but not hospitalization, but rather immediate, community-based expert support. Unfortunately, due to a lack of alternative options, families, school settings and primary care medical practices with youth in crisis often have no choice but to call EMS, summon law enforcement or seek help in emergency departments. These responses occur even when they may not be the best overall options for the youth and may intensify the trauma and stress related to the mental health crisis. On average our regional Children's Hospital alone evaluates 13-15 children per day with mental and behavioral issues. Many of the visits are due to acute situational crises and safety issues related to underlying psychiatric disorders. The ED length of stay for mental health evaluations are extensive due to limited resources for evaluations and the time needed for crises to dissipate and appropriate discharge planning to occur. While most youth with mental health crises are eventually discharged a significant proportion often wait many hours and days for appropriate disposition back into the community. Without comprehensive outpatient management strategies that include a collaboration between families and trained professionals who are equipped to identify, prevent and manage mental health, substance use issues in the community, crises often reoccur leading to vicious cycles placing patients and families at risk for harm. The introduction of the TIDES mobile crisis and stabilization service has proven to be an important addition resources for families, schools, practices in crises and has helped mitigate crises to avoid ED visits and also deescalate volatile situations that prevent trauma and harm to patients and families. It has also served as an important resource for patients discharged from acute care settings such as EDs and inpatient settings

H5527 offers a proven solution through a statewide Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program. Tides Family Services and Family Service of Rhode Island have trained behavioral health professionals to respond directly to children in crisis—where they are, when they need it. Instead of immediate transport to the emergency room, these children receive immediate de-escalation, crisis stabilization, and determination of the best immediate response to the situation including follow-up care in their home, school, or community by the team.

Since October 2022, MRSS teams have served over 1,300 Rhode Island children and successfully diverted more than 90% from hospitalization. This has significantly reduced unnecessary ED visits, improved outcomes for families, and freed up hospital resources for those who truly need acute medical care.

We strongly urge the General Assembly to support H5527 to ensure that every Rhode Island child in crisis has access to the right care at the right time—before an emergency room visit becomes their only option.

Sincerely,

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