

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,

My name is Syd LaBonte and I am a resident of Providence, Rhode Island. I am writing in strong support of House Bill 5527, which would establish a sustainable, statewide Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program for children and youth experiencing behavioral health crises. I am a licensed clinical social worker here in Rhode Island, and have focused all of my education and work on children, youth, and families.

In my first job post graduation, I had the pleasure and privilege of working at Tides Family Services for 5 years. I was able to witness the beginnings of Mobile Crisis services in our state and even work a few cases myself. I know firsthand the urgent need for immediate, community-based crisis support to help children and caregivers navigate behavioral health challenges—without unnecessary emergency room visits or law enforcement involvement.

Now, as I no longer work at Tides, but work at a hospital based outpatient clinic, I frequently refer the youth I work with to MRSS. This allows for hospital diversion, community based and culturally competent support and care, and direct referrals to important and life saving services.

This program works. Since October 2022, Tides Family Services and Family Service of Rhode Island MRSS teams have served over 1,300 children across Rhode Island, successfully diverting more than 90% from hospitalization—keeping kids safe at home and in their communities while saving the state millions in avoidable emergency care costs.

Without permanent funding and statewide coordination, this essential service is at risk. Families should not have to fight for access to care when they are already in crisis. We need to ensure that every Rhode Island child, no matter where they live or what insurance they have, can get immediate help when they need it.

I strongly urge you to support H5527 to protect and expand MRSS, giving Rhode Island families the right support at the right time—before a crisis turns into a tragedy.

Sincerely,

Syd LaBonte, LICSW, C-ACYFSW

sydthesocialworker@gmail.com