



May 22, 2025

The Honorable Representative Marvin Abney, Chairman
Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee
Room 35
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H6128

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We respectfully request that H6128 be amended to remove all references to crisis services. This bill should focus solely on strengthening the 988 telephonic lifeline infrastructure, consistent with the original intent of the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act and FCC rulemaking.

Rhode Island stands at a pivotal moment in transforming its Children's System of Care to meet the consent decree that includes the behavioral health system for children and youth. Major progress has been made through the launch of Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS), which has provided timely, community-based crisis intervention for over 1,300 youth—diverting 92% from psychiatric hospitalization. This effort should be led by DCYF, aligns with federal EPSDT standards, and is supported by legislation under H5527 and H5718. These bills represent the most effective, compliant, and child-centered strategy for sustaining and expanding mobile response and stabilization services for youth. MRSS is fundamentally different from crisis services that are referenced in CCBHC standards. Right now.

We fully support efforts to improve 988 access. However, blending governance or funding streams at this time risks undermining Rhode Island's carefully constructed children's crisis system. Statutory contradictions between H6128 and existing legislation jeopardize implementation and sustainability efforts. To avoid confusion and duplication, we urge you to allow DCYF to continue leading the children's response infrastructure under a clearly defined mandate.

We respectfully recommend:

- A full evaluation of the 988 call center budget to ensure funding needs are transparent.
- A review of the BHDDH budget, including the Mental Health Block Grant, to identify existing funds allocated for 988. This could allow for a reduction of the surcharge, alleviating unnecessary financial burdens on Rhode Island residents.



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We welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively to build strong, coordinated systems for both adults and children. But that work must begin by safeguarding what is already working—and maintaining the governance integrity, fiscal responsibility, and federal alignment required to serve our state's most vulnerable youth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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