

May 22, 2025

**RE: In support of H6128 – An Act Relating to Core State Behavioral Health Crisis Services Systems  
– 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**

Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF), I write to express our support for H6128, legislation that would codify and enhance Rhode Island's behavioral health crisis response system through the implementation and sustainability of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The 988 system represents an opportunity to create a coordinated, equitable, and trauma-informed approach that treats behavioral health crises with the same urgency and dignity as physical health emergencies. 988 is essential, however, it is also critical that a distinct response system appropriate to the needs of children, youth, and their families be available on the other side of their 988 calls.

RICCF members provide significant community-based mental health services through the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs), and other specialty organizations. We have been consistent in our call for an elevated response to children's behavioral health, with a single point of entry/no wrong door for mental health at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. The 988 system is critical, and it must connect with—rather than replace—a children's system of care.

We thank the bill sponsor, Rep. Shallcross Smith, for their collaboration and leadership in ensuring the legislation reflects the needs of children, youth, and families and we are working together to address several of the concerns raised by the children's behavioral health community, including:

- Key to 988 operating effectively is clarifying the system leadership for the 988 system. The legislation positions BHDDH as in charge of the hotline, but BHDDH is not the statutory authority for children's mental health – that requires the involvement of both DCYF and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). The RI Department of Education (RIDE) and RI Department of Health (RIDoH) also should have input into the system of response to 988 calls.
- We also recommend that the Advisory Committee include representatives who specialize in children's behavioral health, as well as a representative of RICCF.
- Finally, Mobile Response and Stabilization (MRSS) is a critical child-focused crisis response program that must be part of the emergency response system.

Having a 988 crisis hotline is critical for our state, but as important is a well-coordinated and responsive system on the other side of the call. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations, and with them we urge support for this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tanja Kubas-Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tanja Kubas-Meyer  
Executive Director