



## **Written Testimony**

### **House Finance Subcommittee on Human Services – DCYF Budget Hearing Senate Bill No. 2886 – AN ACT RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES — JOINT COMMISSION TO STUDY WAYS TO MAXIMIZE REVENUE FOR CHILD WELFARE AND CHILDREN’S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Submitted by:** Christina M. Villatoro, MS

**Title:** Youth Residential Area Director

**Organization:** Community Solutions, Inc. – Coventry House

**Viewpoint:** Support for efforts to maximize sustainable funding for child welfare and children’s behavioral health services

Dear Members of the House Finance Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the DCYF budget and Senate Bill No. 2886, which proposes the creation of a joint commission to study ways to maximize revenue for child welfare and children’s behavioral health services.

I am the Youth Residential Area Director for Community Solutions, Inc., which operates Coventry House, a residential program serving youth involved with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Our program provides trauma-informed residential care and stabilization services to youth with complex behavioral and mental health needs.

Programs like Coventry House play a critical role in Rhode Island’s continuum of care for youth who require structured therapeutic environments. Maintaining these programs requires stable funding structures that reflect the operational realities of residential care and allow providers to respond flexibly to the needs of youth.

Over the past year, our program has made several improvements to strengthen clinical services and maintain compliance with evolving DCYF expectations and trauma-informed care standards. These efforts include program enhancements, facility improvements, and investments in operational infrastructure that support safe and effective service delivery. Like many human service providers, we are also navigating rising operational costs across multiple areas necessary to maintain a safe, therapeutic residential environment.

One of the most significant challenges facing residential providers is staff recruitment and retention. Direct care work in residential settings is demanding and requires specialized training, emotional resilience, and a strong commitment to supporting youth with complex needs. Across the behavioral health and child welfare sectors, providers are experiencing increased competition for qualified staff. Maintaining a stable workforce is essential for providing the consistency and relationship-based care that trauma-informed environments require.

At the same time, residential programs must continue to meet growing administrative, compliance, and documentation requirements. Programs rely on secure electronic health record systems, technology infrastructure, and regulatory reporting tools to maintain accurate records, coordinate care, and comply with state and federal requirements. These systems are essential to delivering accountable, high-quality services but represent ongoing operational costs that are often not fully reflected in reimbursement structures.

Community-based providers also play a critical role in supporting DCYF's ability to respond to changing youth needs. Agencies frequently adapt programming, staffing models, and service approaches to meet evolving clinical and behavioral health needs. Maintaining this level of flexibility is essential to ensuring that youth receive appropriate care in the least restrictive and most supportive environments possible.

As Rhode Island continues to move through Medicaid transformation and broader system reforms, it will be important to ensure that funding structures support—not limit—the ability of providers to remain responsive to youth needs. Residential providers must have reimbursement models that recognize the complexity of the services being delivered and the infrastructure required to support them.

Adequate funding is also essential as the state continues to implement reforms associated with the DCYF Consent Decree, which require expanded service capacity, stronger care coordination, and enhanced system infrastructure. Community providers are key partners in achieving these goals, and sustainable funding is necessary to support these efforts.

Senate Bill No. 2886 represents an important opportunity to evaluate how Rhode Island can strengthen and stabilize funding for child welfare and children's behavioral health services. Ensuring that these services are adequately supported will help preserve critical programs that serve some of the state's most vulnerable youth.

The young people served by DCYF deserve safe, stable environments and access to consistent therapeutic support. Sustaining the programs that serve them requires thoughtful funding policies that reflect the true scope and complexity of residential care.

Thank you for your continued commitment to Rhode Island's children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

**Christina M. Villatoro, MS**  
Youth Residential Area Director  
Community Solutions, Inc. – Coventry House