



May 14, 2026

The Honorable Chairman Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
Room 35
State House
Providence, RI 02903
RE: H7796 - SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Beth Bixby, and I am the CEO of Tides Family Services. I am writing in support of H7796, which establishes a joint commission to study ways to maximize revenue for child welfare and children's behavioral health services.

This legislation comes at a critical time for Rhode Island. Across the country, states are facing increasing uncertainty related to Medicaid financing, federal funding changes, workforce shortages, and growing behavioral health needs among children and families. At the same time, Rhode Island is actively implementing Medicaid transformation efforts that will significantly impact children's behavioral health, child welfare services, juvenile justice programs, schools, hospitals, and community-based providers.

Children's services cannot be treated as an afterthought within these discussions.

The fiscal importance of this bill cannot be overstated. Rhode Island's children's behavioral health and child welfare systems rely on a complex mix of Medicaid, Title IV-E, TANF, federal grants, state general revenue, and other funding sources that are often administered separately and without long-term coordination. Without a coordinated financing strategy, the state risks duplication, inefficiencies, missed federal reimbursement opportunities, and increasing instability across the provider network.

Investing in prevention, stabilization, and community-based services for children is also fiscally responsible. When children and families cannot access timely behavioral health and family support services, costs shift downstream into more expensive systems, including hospital emergency departments, inpatient psychiatric care, residential placements, juvenile justice involvement, special education disruptions, and long-term adult behavioral health needs. The financial impact of failing to stabilize children early is significantly greater than the cost of building a sustainable continuum of community-based care.

This commission creates an opportunity for Rhode Island to proactively examine how to better coordinate and maximize existing federal and state resources before larger fiscal pressures emerge. It allows the state to strategically evaluate Medicaid transformation, federal funding opportunities, provider sustainability, workforce pressures, and cross-agency financing structures together rather than in isolation.



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I strongly support the bill's emphasis on cross-agency coordination and examining how Medicaid transformation may impact provider stability, service access, and continuity of care for children and families. Rhode Island has a unique opportunity to proactively design a sustainable children's behavioral health financing structure rather than reacting after services destabilize.

I also appreciate that this commission includes legislative leaders, state agencies, providers, higher education, and community stakeholders. Meaningful system design requires collaboration across child welfare, Medicaid, behavioral health, education, juvenile justice, and community providers because children and families do not experience these systems separately. The goal must be maximizing stability, access, prevention, and long-term outcomes for Rhode Island's children while preserving a strong continuum of community-based care.

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

Respectfully,

Beth A. Bixby, LICSW
Chief Executive Officer
Tides Family Services