



May 14, 2026

The Honorable Chairman Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
Room 35
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H8177

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. Tides serves children and families across Rhode Island in behavioral health, child welfare, and juvenile justice, including operating Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS).

I appreciate the intent behind H8177 and the importance of ensuring sustainable funding for Rhode Island's 988 infrastructure and suicide prevention services. Access to behavioral health crisis support is critically important, and all Rhode Islanders should have access to timely help during moments of crisis.

However, I do have significant concerns regarding how this legislation may further blur the lines between the adult behavioral health crisis system and Rhode Island's children's behavioral health system.

Children are not simply small adults, and children's crisis response systems require different operational structures, governance, clinical approaches, family engagement models, and statutory oversight. Rhode Island has spent years building a children's System of Care framework through DCYF, community providers, schools, families, and the federal consent decree process. MRSS was specifically designed as a child- and family-centered response model that stabilizes youth in their homes and communities and diverts unnecessary emergency department utilization, hospitalization, and law enforcement involvement.

Since November 2022, MRSS providers statewide have collectively served more than 3,000 families with approximately a 92% community stabilization success rate. These services are working because they are designed specifically for children and families.

My concern is not with 988 itself, but with continued system drift that risks unintentionally consolidating children's crisis response into broader adult behavioral health infrastructure without sufficient clarity around governance, operational responsibility, and coordination.



TIDES FAMILY SERVICES

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For children's behavioral health services, Rhode Island law currently places statutory authority and oversight responsibilities within DCYF. It is critical that any expansion or stabilization of the 988 system does not inadvertently weaken or bypass the existing children's behavioral health framework, consent decree obligations, or MRSS infrastructure already operating statewide.

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