



May 14, 2026

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

RE: H8180- Children's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services- Support

Good Afternoon Chairman Abney and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 8180. My name is Beth Bixby, and I serve as Chief Executive Officer of Tides Family Services, a Rhode Island-based organization that has supported children and families across our state for decades, particularly those involved in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and children's behavioral health systems. Every day, our teams are in homes, schools, and communities working alongside youth and families in crisis. For us, this issue is deeply personal. What H8180 represents is not theoretical; it is the difference between a system that works for children and families and one that does not.

Today, when a child experiences a behavioral health crisis, families are often left with only a few options: call 911, go to the emergency room, or involve law enforcement. These are not treatment responses—they are last-resort interventions that can retraumatize children, disrupt families, and escalate situations unnecessarily. Children in crisis are not small adults; their needs are shaped by developmental stage, trauma, and environment.

Yet, too often, our systems respond as if they are. H8180 addresses this gap by ensuring that when a family says, "we need help," trained child competent behavioral health professionals respond—meeting children and caregivers where they are safest, whether at home, at school, or within their community.

Rhode Island has already demonstrated that Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) work. We have seen firsthand that when the right response is deployed, crises can be safely stabilized in the community, hospitalizations are avoided, families remain intact, and the overall cost to the system is reduced. However, without statutory protection, MRSS remains vulnerable to administrative changes, funding shifts, and structural uncertainty that could move the system away from what has clearly been proven to work.



Codifying MRSS through H8180 establishes essential guardrails to ensure the model remains child-centered, community-based, and clinically appropriate. It also guarantees access and reliability so that families can count on this service when they need it most. And finally, it creates accountability and sustainability by setting clear expectations and maintaining a consistent, transparent system statewide.

It is important to note that this legislation also aligns with Rhode Island's legal and ethical obligations. The State is currently operating under a federal consent decree requiring timely, community-based behavioral health services for children. MRSS is central to fulfilling that mandate.

Without a clearly defined statewide MRSS system, we risk gaps in care, delays in response, and continued reliance on emergency departments or law enforcement—none of which are appropriate or effective for a child in crisis. H8180 ensures that Rhode Island not only meets its federal obligations but builds a system that truly works for the children and families we serve.

The evidence supporting MRSS is strong. It is a proven, cost-effective model that produces measurable outcomes, including high rates of crisis stabilization, significant reductions in hospitalizations, and lower system costs compared to institutional care. Responding early and within the community is not only clinically effective but fiscally responsible—it is both the compassionate and the prudent choice.

At its heart, H8180 affirms a simple but critical principle: children deserve care designed specifically for them, families deserve help in their moment of need, and our system must respond to children rather than force them to fit into systems that were never built for them. Codifying MRSS ensures that no child in Rhode Island is left without the right support, at the right time, in the right place.

On behalf of Tides Family Services and the families we serve, I urge you to support H8180. This legislation protects a system that works—a system that saves lives, strengthens families, and uses state resources wisely. Most importantly, it ensures that when a child is in crisis, Rhode Island responds the right way. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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