

Brett P. Smiley
Mayor

Colonel Oscar L. Perez
Chief of Police



Department of Public Safety, Police Department
"Building Pride in Providence"

5/12/2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chairman, House Committee on Finance
RI General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support for H8180 – Children’s Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS)

Chairman Abney and members of the committee:

I write in support of H8180, which would establish a standalone, statewide Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program. Law enforcement officers are frequently called to respond to youth experiencing behavioral health crises, yet we recognize that police intervention is not always the best solution. MRSS provides an effective, trauma-informed alternative that ensures children receive immediate behavioral health support without unnecessary law enforcement involvement.

When emergency personnel are dispatched to a child in crisis, the presence of uniformed officers and emergency vehicles can escalate fear and distress, both for the child and their family. This can lead to increased resistance, the use of restraints, or, in some cases, justice system involvement for youth who would be better served by mental health professionals. MRSS reduces these risks by deploying trained behavioral health responders who can de-escalate situations safely and provide follow-up care, preventing repeated crises.

Since its implementation in Rhode Island in 2022, MRSS providers have successfully diverted over 90% of the children that the program serves from hospitalization or other high-intensity interventions. This means fewer 911 calls, fewer police-involved incidents, and a more appropriate crisis response for youth in need. MRSS allows law enforcement to focus on public safety while ensuring children receive the right care at the right time.

We urge you to support H8180 to make MRSS a permanent resource for Rhode Island families. This legislation will reduce traumatic interventions, decrease unnecessary law enforcement involvement, and ensure that children receive compassionate, community-based care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar L. Perez", is written over a faint circular stamp.

Oscar L. Perez
Colonel
Chief of Police