

May 12, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney  
Chair, House Finance Committee  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI, 02903

**RE: Support for H8180- An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government- Children's Mobile Crisis Response and Stabilization Services.**

Dear Chair Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for H8180 which would establish a standalone statewide Mobile Response and Stabilization Service (MRSS) for children and families.

My name is Gwendolyn Vargas. I am a School Social Worker at The Learning Community Charter School in Central Falls, Rhode Island, and a Licensed Mental Health Therapist at Claridad Community Services in Pawtucket. I work at the intersection of education and mental health, in one of the most under-resourced communities in our state. I write to you not only as a professional and as a witness to the heartbreak and the unmet need that shows up in my office every single day. I am writing in strong support of H8180.

In my work, I have held children through crises that no child should have to navigate alone. I have sat with families who called every number they could find and were told to wait. I have watched students leave school in the back of an ambulance for a behavioral health crisis - not because that was the right intervention - but because it was the only one available. Emergency rooms are not therapeutic environments for children in crisis. They are loud, clinical, and frightening. They stabilize... sometimes.

In those moments, instead of a waiting room, families need a trained clinician at their door within the hour. They need someone who speaks the language of trauma, of child development, of family systems and can meet them where they are (literally and figuratively). That is exactly what the Mobile Response and Stabilization Service provides.

The MRSS model is not a new idea and has been proven to be effective. It is a 24/7, 365-day resource, available to every child in Rhode Island regardless of zip code, insurance status, or circumstance. When a child is in crisis, MRSS responds within one hour, wherever that child is whether that be school or at home. That kind of reach matters enormously in communities like ours, where the distance between a family and the nearest mental health resource can feel insurmountable.

H8180 secures this service. By establishing MRSS as a standalone, state-sanctioned program grounded in evidence and sustained through a braided funding model, this legislation ensures that no child is turned away because of a funding gap, a system silo, or an administrative oversight. It ensures that what works is protected - and that the families who need it most are never left without a lifeline.

I have seen what happens when the right support arrives on time. I have also seen what happens when it does not. The difference is not abstract. It is the difference between a child who returns to school on Monday and one who does not return at all. It is the difference between a family that learns to navigate a crisis together and one that fractures under the weight of it.

Rhode Island's children are not asking for much. They are asking to be safe. They are asking for someone to show up. H8180 is our answer to that ask.

I respectfully and urgently urge this committee to support H8180. The children I serve do not have the luxury of waiting for the next legislative session and while their crises do not follow a calendar, with your support, the help they need can.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to the youngest and most vulnerable members of our state.

Sincerely,

*Gwendolyn Vargas*