

Members of the House Finance Committee

RI State House
Providence, RI

RE: H8180 – SUPPORT

Good afternoon members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of H8180, establishing a statewide Children’s Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) system. As a full-time social worker for La Salle Academy, serving nearly 1,500 students, I can personally attest to the immediate positive impact this program can provide all Rhode Island students.

As a school community, we are increasingly encountering students experiencing behavioral health crises during the school day. These situations are complex, urgent, and deeply impactful—not only for the individual student, but for classmates, staff, and the broader school environment.

Currently, when a student is in crisis, schools often face limited options. We may need to call emergency services or refer families to hospital-based care. While sometimes necessary, these responses are disruptive and can escalate an already difficult situation. They also remove the student from their learning environment and support systems at a critical moment.

Schools are not designed to serve as crisis response systems—but we are often the first place where these crises emerge.

H8180 offers a better solution. Mobile Response and Stabilization Services allow trained behavioral health professionals to come directly to the school, assess the situation in real time, and provide immediate, appropriate support. This approach keeps students in their community, supports de-escalation, and allows for continuity in both care and education.

We have seen the value of community-based, child-centered interventions. When students receive timely support in familiar environments, outcomes improve—not only clinically, but academically and socially as well.

This legislation ensures that support is available when and where it is needed most—within 60 minutes, in schools, homes, and communities.

At its core, H8180 recognizes that children are not small adults, and their needs must be addressed differently. As educators, we strongly support this approach.

We urge the Committee to pass H8180 to ensure that students across Rhode Island have access to the right response in moments of crisis.

Respectfully Submitted

Heather Ferro, LICSW