



The Substance Use and
Mental Health Leadership Council of RI

5/14/2026

Good afternoon Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is John J. Tassoni Jr., and I am the President/CEO of the Substance Use and Mental Health Leadership Council of RI and a former Rhode Island State Senator. I am writing in strong support of H8180, which codifies Children's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) as a statewide service for Rhode Island children and families.

Across Rhode Island, we continue to see increasing behavioral health needs among children and youth. Families, schools, emergency departments, law enforcement, and providers are all feeling the strain of a system that too often responds to children's crises only after situations escalate.

MRSS changes that model.

This service brings trained behavioral health professionals directly to children and families in their homes, schools, and communities during moments of crisis — helping stabilize situations early, reducing trauma, and avoiding unnecessary emergency room visits, hospitalization, or involvement with law enforcement. It is a practical, family-centered approach that reflects how children's behavioral health services should operate.

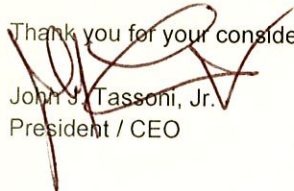
What makes this legislation especially important is that it creates long-term stability and accountability for these services. H8180 establishes MRSS as a statewide, community-based system supported through braided funding that includes Medicaid, commercial insurance, and state general revenue. Without all three funding sources working together, services like this remain vulnerable to budget pressures, policy shifts, and changing leadership priorities.

We have already seen the impact these services can have across Rhode Island. Since implementation, thousands of families have been served successfully in their communities, helping keep children safe, connected to their families, and out of higher-cost systems of care whenever clinically appropriate.

As someone who has spent years both in public service and leading efforts focused on behavioral health and substance use, I believe H8180 represents the type of strategic investment Rhode Island must continue making. This bill also appropriately recognizes that children's behavioral health services are distinct from adult crisis systems and require providers with specialized expertise in child and family care. Preserving that distinction is critical as Rhode Island continues broader healthcare and Medicaid transformation efforts.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support H8180 and continue investing in a strong, sustainable children's behavioral health system for Rhode Island families.

Thank you for your consideration.


John J. Tassoni, Jr.
President / CEO