



March 18, 2025

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan
Chair, House Health and Human Services Committee
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for H5497

Chair Donovan and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H5497, which would require EOHHS to develop a budget and seek funding to establish an early childhood mental health hub program to improve access to infant and early childhood mental health services for children under six years and their families. The hub would be funded as a pilot program for a minimum of three years. While we support this bill, we believe that the hub should sit with the Division of Children's Behavioral Health at DCYF, which holds the authority over children's behavioral health.

My name is Margaret Holland McDuff, and I am CEO of FSRI. FSRI is a behavioral health and social service organization delivering over 30 programs to support children, families and individuals across the state. FSRI has been serving Rhode Islanders for decades, including programming to support healthy child development, provide essential behavioral health services, and coordinate crisis intervention programs that help children and families thrive.

FSRI provides a number of services for young children and their families, including Early Intervention, First Connections, Healthy Families America. We also recently became a provider of Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), in 2022, funded by a four-year federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA). PCIT is an evidence-based behavior parent training treatment for young children (ages 2-7) with emotional and behavioral disorders. The therapy focuses on improving the quality of the parent-child relationship and changing parent-child interaction patterns.

We had seen a rise in recent years in the number of young children needing and seeking access to mental and behavioral health services. This in part supported our decision to apply for funding for PCIT in 2022. As a provider of PCIT and many early childhood programs, we are in strong support of this legislation to ensure that we are expanding capacity to meet the behavioral health needs of our youngest residents.



I do note that the legislation as written identifies EOHHS as the department that manages the children's behavioral health system of care (page 2 lines 15 and 16); this should be corrected and DCYF should be the department identified as children's behavioral health is their responsibility. Furthermore, as noted above, the hub should sit with DCYF, which holds the authority over children's behavioral health.

According to The Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) statute, codified in Title 42 Chapter 7.2 of the R.I. General Laws, "EOHHS exists to improve the efficiency, coordination, and quality of state health and human services policy, planning, budgeting, and financing." EOHHS should play a role in a governance structure of the hub to bring in the resources and coordination across all the health and human service departments. However, DCYF, in accordance with RIGL 42-72-5, is responsible for the delivery of appropriate mental health services for children birth to 21 that match the needs of children. Therefore, the hub should be the closest to the actual services that families can access for their children, which is DCYF.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of H5497, with comments regarding department authority, and please feel free to contact me with any questions or follow-up.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Holland McDuff', written in a cursive style.

Margaret Holland McDuff
CEO