



March 25, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee  
Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
State of Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support for House Bill H8247

Dear Chairperson McEntee and Members of the Senate Committee,

I am writing to express Family Service of Rhode Island's strong support for House Bill 8247, which proposes changing the name of Drug Court to Recovery Court. As Chief of Behavioral Health at Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI), I believe this change represents an important and meaningful step toward aligning our systems with recovery-oriented values and person-centered language.

Family Service of Rhode Island is proud to serve as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), providing a comprehensive continuum of behavioral health and recovery services to children, adults, and families across Rhode Island. Our work is grounded in recovery principles that emphasize hope, resilience, and the belief that individuals can and do recover from substance use and mental health challenges. Language plays a powerful role in shaping how individuals view themselves and how systems support them. Moving from "Drug Court" to "Recovery Court" reflects a strengths-based, recovery-focused approach that reinforces dignity and promotes engagement in services.

As a CCBHC, FSRI is committed to delivering integrated behavioral health and recovery services, including substance use treatment, peer recovery supports, crisis intervention, and ongoing care coordination. We work closely with individuals involved in the justice system and see firsthand how recovery-focused language can reduce stigma, encourage participation in treatment, and foster long-term positive outcomes. The proposed name change aligns with best practices in behavioral health and supports Rhode Island's continued progress toward a recovery-oriented system of care.

Adopting recovery-friendly language across our systems is not simply symbolic, it helps create an environment where individuals feel respected, supported, and empowered in their recovery journeys. House Bill 8247 reflects Rhode Island's commitment to modernizing our approach and ensuring that our policies and practices reflect the values we strive to uphold.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to strengthening Rhode Island's behavioral health and recovery systems. Family Service of Rhode Island strongly urges passage of House Bill 8247.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sarah Kelly-Palmer'.

Sarah Kelly-Palmer  
Chief of Behavioral Health  
Family Service of Rhode Island

Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

My name is Jessica Fortier-Goss, MS, LADC1, and I serve as President of the Opiate Treatment Association of Rhode Island (OTARI). In this role, I represent all licensed opioid treatment programs across the state, working daily to support individuals affected by opioid use disorder and to strengthen systems of care that promote recovery and save lives.

I am writing to express strong support for bills H8247 and S3099. These important pieces of legislation represent a meaningful step forward in addressing the ongoing opioid crisis in Rhode Island by improving access to evidence-based treatment and enhancing the quality and coordination of care for those in need.

Opioid treatment programs play a critical role in reducing overdose deaths, improving public health outcomes, and helping individuals regain stability in their lives. The policies outlined in H8247 and S3099 will help ensure that providers can continue to deliver safe, effective, and accessible care while adapting to the evolving needs of our communities.

Additionally, the proposed change in terminology from “drug court” to “recovery court” is a critical and commendable step in reducing stigma and aligning our language with the principles of treatment and recovery. Language matters. The term “drug court” can perpetuate punitive perceptions, whereas “recovery court” more accurately reflects a health-centered, rehabilitative approach. This shift helps foster dignity and respect for participants, encourages greater engagement in treatment, and promotes more positive long-term outcomes. Reducing stigma is essential to ensuring that individuals feel safe seeking help and remaining connected to care.

On behalf of OTARI and the patients and families we serve, I urge you to support and pass these bills. Your leadership and commitment to addressing substance use disorder are vital to the health and well-being of Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Jessica Fortier-Goss, MS, LADC1

President

Opiate Treatment Association of Rhode Island (OTARI)



March 25, 2026

Dear Respected Members of the General Assembly,

I am writing in support of Bills H8247 and S3099. These measures will strengthen Rhode Island's response to the opioid crisis by expanding access to evidence-based treatment and improving coordination of care.

The existence of substance-use treatment programs like the Galilee Mission, offering residential, intensive/outpatient and sober living programs are essential to helping individuals obtain recovery and to maintain sobriety. The policies in these bills will ensure providers can continue offering affordable and accessible care.

I also strongly support the shift from "drug court" to "recovery court." This change reduces stigma and better reflects a health-focused, rehabilitative approach that encourages engagement and supports long-term recovery.

On behalf of our clients, staff and families, I urge you to support and pass these bills. Your leadership is vital to the health and well-being of Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,

*Lynn E. Serra*

Lynn E. Serra  
Galilee Mission, Inc.



March 25, 2026

Representative Carol McEntee  
Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support for H8247**

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Honorable Committee Members,

As Chief Operating Officer at VICTA and Policy Chair for the RI Association for Addiction Professionals, I am writing in support of H8247, which would change the name of Rhode Island's Drug Court to the more accurate term of Recovery Court.

When individuals are assigned to this specific path within the criminal legal system, the goal is to help support them in finding recovery from Substance Use Disorder (SUD). The way that we describe this process reinforces expectations – in this case, the expectation that recovery is possible and can lead to a life free of legal involvement.

I would like to thank Representative Casimiro and her co-sponsors for putting forth this bill to ensure that our language reflects the goals of alternative sentencing and our support for people whose SUD has led to legal involvement as they find recovery.

Sincerely,

Lisa Peterson, LMHC/LCDP/LCDS/MAC

3-23-26

**Support for S-3099 and H-8247: Renaming Drug Court to Recovery Court**

Dear Honorable Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Council on Problem Gambling, I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill S-3099 and House Bill H-8247, which propose renaming the state's Drug Court to the "Recovery Court."

We respectfully support the proposed name change from "Drug Court" to "Recovery Court" because it more accurately reflects the mission, values, and outcomes that these programs are designed to achieve.

First, the term "Recovery Court" emphasizes hope, healing, and the potential for positive change. Individuals who participate in these programs are working toward rebuilding their lives, not simply being defined by past substance use. Language that highlights recovery helps foster dignity and respect, which are essential components of successful engagement and long-term outcomes.

Second, this change helps reduce the stigma often associated with substance use disorders and related behavioral health challenges, including problem gambling. Stigmatizing language can discourage individuals from seeking help or fully engaging in treatment. A recovery-oriented name signals a supportive and person-centered approach that aligns with modern public health practices.

Third, renaming the court aligns with evidence-based approaches that recognize addiction as a chronic, treatable condition. It reinforces the understanding that these courts are not solely punitive, but are designed to support sustained recovery, reduce recidivism, and improve overall community well-being.

Finally, the term "Recovery Court" better reflects the evolving scope of these programs. Many participants experience co-occurring issues, including mental health challenges and problem gambling. A broader, recovery-focused name is more inclusive and representative of the comprehensive services provided.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Council on Problem Gambling strongly supports the passage of S-3099 and H-8247 and the adoption of the name "Recovery Court." We believe this change will help advance a more compassionate, effective, and forward-thinking approach to addressing substance use and related challenges in our state.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Joyce LCDP, CPRS, CCHW

President

Rhode Island Council on Problem Gambling



District Court of Rhode Island  
Garrahy Judicial Complex  
One Dorrance Plaza  
Providence, RI 02903

JEANNE E. LaFAZIA  
CHIEF JUDGE

March 20, 2026

RE: H 26-8247

Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to enthusiastically support changing the name of the Superior Court Drug Court to the Superior Court Recovery Court. For over 15 years, I served as the Vice President of the New England Association of Recovery Court Professionals (NEARCP), formerly known as The New England Association of Drug Court Professionals (NEADCP). In 2020, we officially changed our name, substituting "Recovery Courts" for "Drug Courts". This was done by a unanimous vote of all members representing all six new England states. It was believed by all that the term "Recovery Court" is a better reflection of the good work done in these specialty courts. It furthermore reduces the stigma so often attached to the name, thereby providing better opportunities for the participants who work so hard for a better, cleaner, and more productive future.

I believe this name change will better serve this important program.

I hope that you will look favorably upon this bill. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Jeanne E. LaFazia

JEL/mhp



Workers' Compensation Court of the State of Rhode Island  
Garrahy Judicial Complex  
One Dorrance Plaza  
Providence, RI 02903

ROBERT M. FERRIERI  
CHIEF JUDGE

March 23, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee  
Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Re: Renaming Drug Court to Recovery Court

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in support of a Bill which would change the name of the Superior Court Drug Court to the Superior Court Recovery Court. As the Chief Judge of the Workers' Compensation Court, I have become aware of the many challenges that injured employees have with regards to drug use. Those who have successfully graduated from the Superior Court Drug Court are to be commended for their hard work and dedication to recovery. A change of the name would effectively work to diminish any stigma that may be associated with the term "drug".

Very truly yours,

Robert M. Ferrieri  
Chief Judge



Henry Sachs, MD  
President  
Bradley Hospital  
1011 Veterans Memorial Parkway  
East Providence RI 02915  
  
Tel. (401) 432.1154  
hsachs@brownhealth.org  
The Warren Alpert Medical  
School of Brown University

March 23, 2026

### **Support for S-3099 and H-8247: Renaming Drug Court to Recovery Court**

Dear Honorable Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

On behalf of Bradley Hospital, I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill S-3099 and House Bill H-8247, which propose renaming the state's Drug Court to Recovery Court. This change represents a meaningful and necessary progression in how we address substance use disorders by prioritizing long-term healing, dignity and sustained recovery over short-term compliance.

The term Drug Court can unintentionally reinforce stigma and limit the broader understanding of addiction as a chronic, treatable health condition. Recovery Court reflects a more modern, evidence-based approach that centers recovery as a lifelong process and acknowledges the complex social, psychological and medical factors involved.

Recovery Courts emphasize individualized care and long-term support systems, which help individuals rebuild stable, productive lives. By shifting the focus from punishment and compliance to recovery and resilience, we improve outcomes and strengthen families and communities.

In a state that has been deeply impacted by the overdose crisis, adopting the Recovery Court name sends a powerful message that Rhode Island is committed to treating substance use disorder as a public health issue first, while still maintaining accountability and public safety. It is a compassionate, practical and forward-thinking approach that aligns with national best practices.

For these reasons, Bradley Hospital strongly supports the passage of S-3099 and H-8247 and the adoption of the name "Recovery Court."

Sincerely,



Henry T Sachs III, MD  
President

# Superior Court of Rhode Island

JOSEPH A. MONTALBANO  
ASSOCIATE JUSTICE

Providence

March 10, 2026

Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**ATTN: Representative Casimiro**

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in support of Representative Casimiro's Bill No. 8247, which would change the name of the Superior Court Drug Court to the Superior Court Recovery Court. As an Associate Justice of the Superior Court I have become keenly aware of the many challenges defendants struggling with substance abuse face as they navigate the criminal justice system. Those who have successfully graduated from the Superior Court Drug Court are to be commended for their hard work and dedication to their recovery. Changing the name of the Drug Court to the Recovery Court would remove any stigma attached to the word "Drug," and more accurately describe the goals of this Specialty Court, which has been a model to the rest of the country in its mission and effectiveness.

Sincerely,



Joseph A. Montalbano  
Associate Justice  
Rhode Island Superior Court

JAM/cmm



Family Court of the State of Rhode Island  
One Barrance Plaza  
Providence, RI 02903

MICHAEL B. FORTE  
CHIEF JUDGE

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee  
Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

March 10, 2026

**Re: House Bill 2026-H 8247**

Dear Chair Hagan McEntee:

The Family Court wholeheartedly supports the passage of 2026-H 8247 which proposes to substitute the term "recovery court" for "drug court" in §8-2-39.2 of the Generals Laws.

The change in terms effectively works to diminish any stigma that may be associated with participation in the program.

Very truly yours,

Michael B. Forte



March 11, 2026

The Honorable Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Support for H8247 – Recovery Court Terminology Update/Change**

Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

On behalf of Community Blessings Foundation (d/b/a Healthy Living in Recovery), I write to express our strong support for H8247, which proposes changing the term “drug court” to “recovery court” in court proceedings.

As a recovery organization that operates a licensed behavioral healthcare clinic and recovery residences, we are dedicated to helping individuals recover from substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health conditions.

The language we use matters. “Recovery court” better reflects the hope, dignity, and opportunity at the heart of these judicial programs. It shifts the narrative from stigma and punishment to healing, rehabilitation, and empowerment—values that are core to our mission and to a humane, effective behavioral health system.

Our recent achievements include a BHDDH grant for “Pathways to Freedom: Reducing Recidivism through Recovery and Empowerment,” a trauma-informed initiative supporting justice-involved individuals with recovery housing and outpatient services

Changing the terminology to “recovery court” sends a positive message and demonstrates Rhode Island’s leadership in reducing stigma and supporting lasting recovery.

Thank you for considering this important bill and for your continued support of recovery initiatives in our state.

Sincerely,

*Christine Nolan*

Christine Nolan  
Executive Director  
Community Blessings Foundation  
d/b/a Healthy Living in Recovery  
P-401-662-5390

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March 12, 2026

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for Bill 8247, which proposes to rename Rhode Island's "Drug Courts" to "Recovery Courts."

As an Addiction Medicine physician, I believe this is an important step toward progressing the treatment of substance use disorders. The term "Drug Court" focuses on the illicit substance and the "crime," whereas "Recovery Court" focuses on the solution and the person. The word "drug" carries a heavy social stigma that can discourage participants. Using "Recovery" aligns the court's title with its actual mission: rehabilitation and long-term health.

Rhode Island is a respected state in the field of addiction for being progressive, and this is another opportunity to lead by example in treating addiction as a public health crisis. By adopting the name "Recovery Court," Rhode Island formally acknowledges that the measure of success is not just the absence of drugs, but the presence of a healthy and productive life.

I respectfully urge the Committee to provide a favorable recommendation for Bill 8247. Thank you for your time and for your dedication to the people of Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

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Tommy Pham, MD  
Regional Medical Director  
BHG Rhode Island Treatment Centers  
O: 401-727-1287 / F: 401-727-1289

Visit [www.bhgrecovery.com](http://www.bhgrecovery.com)





AmericanAddictionCenters  
AdCare Rhode Island

AdCare Rhode Island  
1950 Tower Hill Rd  
North Kingstown, RI 02852

**3/15/2026**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to support Representatives Casimiro, Stewart, Cruz, Shallcross Smith, Slater, Bennett, Read, Potter, Giraldo, and Diaz who proposed to change the name of “drug court” to “recovery court” in RI Superior court in Bill 2026 -- H 8247.

Sincerely,

Nicole Paliotti, MBA, MHA  
Executive Director, AdCare RI



**TIDES FAMILY SERVICES**

**WE NEVER GIVE UP ON A KID... NEVER!**

15 Washington St.  
West Warwick  
Rhode Island,  
02893

Main Office - 401-822-1360

Fax - 401-823-4694

March 10, 2026

Dear Representatives Casimiro, Stewart, Cruz, Shallcross Smith, Slater, Bennett, Read, Potter, Giraldo, and Diaz:

My name is Beth Bixby, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of Tides Family Services. I write today in support of H8247 to change the term of drug court to recovery court.

Tides Family Services works every day with Rhode Island's most vulnerable children and families — youth in crisis, youth involved with DCYF, and families who are doing everything they can to keep their children safely at home. We see firsthand what happens when systems work well — and what happens when they do not.

The shift from the “drug court” to “recovery court” signifies a critical evolution in the justice system, where language is intentionally used to reduce stigma, improve treatment engagement, and foster a more supportive, therapeutic environment. The language used by practitioners- including judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys-has the power to either foster an environment of rehabilitation or perpetuate stigma that leads to failure.

Moving away from punitive, stigmatizing labels such as "addict" or "substance abuser" to person-first language (e.g., "person with a substance use disorder") helps reframe addiction as a chronic, treatable disease rather than a moral failing.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth Bixby, LICSW  
Chief Executive Officer

# **Coastline EAP,-RISAS**

931 Jefferson Boulevard Ste 1001  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886

March 9, 2026

RE: H8247

Honorable Rhode Island Legislators:

I am writing to express my support for the proposed legislative change H8247 to rename Drug Court as Recovery Court. Language plays a powerful role in shaping perceptions, and the term “Drug Court” carries a significant stigma that can negatively affect individuals who are working to rebuild their lives while living with a substance use disorder.

For many participants, being labeled as a “drug offender” or associated with a “drug court” reinforces feelings of shame and guilt. These emotions can undermine confidence and self-worth, both of which are essential components of the recovery process. Recovery requires encouragement, dignity, and the opportunity for individuals to view themselves as capable of positive change. Unfortunately, stigmatizing labels can have the opposite effect and may even hinder progress toward long-term recovery.

Individuals involved in these programs often face significant barriers when seeking employment, housing, education, and community support. The negative connotations associated with the term “Drug Court” can compound those challenges and perpetuate harmful stereotypes about people living with substance use disorders. When individuals internalize these labels, their self-esteem and mental health can suffer, placing them at greater risk of relapsing rather than supporting their movement toward recovery and stability.

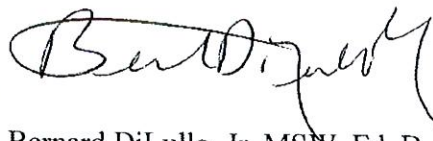
The field of recovery has increasingly recognized the importance of person-centered and non-stigmatizing language. Professionals, researchers, and advocates consistently encourage the use of terminology that reflects empathy, dignity, and hope. Renaming Drug Court to Recovery Court aligns with these principles and better reflects the program’s true mission: helping individuals overcome substance use disorders and build healthier, more productive lives.

A name change may seem like a small step, but language matters. Shifting to “Recovery Court” signals a commitment to supporting individuals in recovery rather than defining them by their illness. It communicates respect, reduces stigma, and aligns the justice system with modern recovery-oriented practices.

For these reasons, I strongly support the legislative effort to change the name from Drug Court to Recovery Court. This change would demonstrate compassion, promote dignity, and reinforce a recovery-focused approach for individuals working to overcome substance use disorders.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to policies that support recovery and strengthen our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernard DiLullo, Jr.", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Bernard DiLullo, Jr. MSW, Ed. D  
Interim Chief Operating Officer  
Coastline Employee Assistance Program/Rhode Island Student Assistance Program



Toni Almeida-Russell, MS, LCDP, LADC-1, CGS, CCTP  
1526 Atwood Ave Suite 104  
Johnston, RI 02919  
Cell: 401-381-5372  
Email: [tarussell@elliementalhealth.com](mailto:tarussell@elliementalhealth.com)

03/09/2026

The Honorable Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly State House 82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support for H8247 – An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure — Courts — Superior Court**

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

I am writing to express my strong support for **H8247**, legislation that would update statutory language by changing the term “**drug court**” to “**recovery court.**” This change, while simple, carries meaningful significance for the individuals, families, and communities impacted by substance use disorders.

The term “*recovery court*” reflects the purpose, philosophy, and outcomes of these specialized dockets. Recovery courts are not merely addressing drug-related offenses; they are designed to support individuals in achieving long-term stability, accountability, and wellness. The updated terminology aligns with modern, evidence-based approaches that emphasize treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery rather than stigma or punishment.

Renaming the program to *recovery court* also reinforces Rhode Island’s commitment to person-centered language. It acknowledges that participants are more than their addiction and that the court’s mission is to help them rebuild their lives. This shift in language can strengthen public understanding, reduce stigma, and support the broader statewide effort to treat substance use disorders as a health issue.

H8247 is a thoughtful and timely update that aligns our legal terminology with the values and goals of our justice and public health systems. I respectfully urge the General

Assembly to pass this legislation and continue supporting initiatives that promote recovery, dignity, and community well-being.

Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing work on behalf of Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Toni Almeida-Russell, MS, LCDP, LADC-1, CGS, CCTP

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Toni Almeida-Russell".

1526 Atwood Ave Suite 104

Johnston, RI 02919

Cell: 401-381-5372

Email: [tarussell@elliementalhealth.com](mailto:tarussell@elliementalhealth.com)