



Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services
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March 6, 2024

Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chairman
House Committee on State Government & Elections
101 State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: **2025 H 5452, 2025 H 5718--**

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Please accept this letter from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services regarding **H5452** and **H5718**.

H5452 states that it would be the public policy of the state that the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) be the chief agency responsible for all matters related to children's behavioral health.

H5718 more specifically expands the scope and power of DCYF to oversee and administer all behavioral health services for children and to create a framework for the children's behavioral health services adhering to Medicaid requirements.

EOHHS is fundamentally committed to the continued strengthening of children's behavioral health services in an interagency and public/private manner and is mindful of the Department of Justice consent decree with DCYF. EOHHS coordinated the development and writing of the Rhode Island Behavioral Health System of Care Plan for Children and Youth between 2020 and 2021, publishing it in March 2022. The plan was created with a broad interagency team, including DCYF, the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), the Department of Human Services (DHS), as well as the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and scores of community partners.

Currently, EOHHS is responding to a Senate Resolution that asked the Secretariat to produce a report with a plan to move children's mental health services from DCYF to BHDDH, due April 1, 2025. As suggested in the Resolution, we used the Health Care System Planning process, seeking input from the Behavioral Health Workgroup on the question – and also carried out focus group discussions with state agency leadership and staff.

Our approach to the report has been to develop multiple options that policymakers could consider to strengthen children's behavioral health across our member agencies and beyond. EOHHS is completing the draft of the report in advance of the due date and shared it with community partners this week.

Regardless of where the behavioral health authority for children lies, the following statements seem to reflect a consensus from participants in the planning process:

- Clinical leadership is needed to support the children's mental health authority, including relevant specialists (developmental-behavioral pediatricians, child psychologists, child psychiatrists).
- Similarly, the authority and System of Care work requires formal participation and leadership from parents, caregivers, youth, and those with lived experience.
- Prevention should continue to be prioritized through the System of Care.
- Consolidation and de-duplication of strategic plans, programs, and payments is necessary.

- Finally, care needs to continue to be integrated with social work, case management, and health-related social needs.

Based on R.I.G.L. §42-7.2-2, EOHHS plays an important umbrella role in coordinating between and among the EOHHS agencies. Further, EOHHS plays a role in coordinating with other state agencies that play various roles in supporting critical behavioral health services and supports for children and youth. Under this current status and authority, EOHHS also has the responsibility and obligation to support collaboration and alignment among its member agencies – and the authority and ability to address cross-cutting issues that are not within DCYF's purview to carry out.

We respectfully ask you to review the report that we will be submitting by April 1, and we look forward to discussing it in more depth with you and with members of your committee.

EOHHS appreciates the intent of this legislation, and will continue to work in partnership with the General Assembly, our Rhode Island community partners, and our constituency to ensure that individuals receive quality care. I also appreciate your leadership and hard work on behalf of all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,



Richard Charest R., Ph, MBA, Secretary
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

CC: Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Elections
Honorable Julie A. Casimiro
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy