

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



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March 6, 2025

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

RE: 2025 – H 5452 & H 5718 An Act Relating To State Affairs And Government -- Department Of Children, Youth And Families

Dear Chair Shanley:

I am writing regarding **H 5452** and **H 5718**. H 5452 provides that it is 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. H 5718 expands the DCYF powers by overseeing and administering comprehensive behavioral health services for children with serious emotional disturbances and children with developmental or functional disabilities.

BHDDH is the Single State Agency (SSA) (see 42 USC § 300x-32) for mental health and for substance use disorder prevention and treatment, as well as the state opioid treatment authority (SOTA). H 5452 and H 5718 will cause a disruption to the system and continuum of care as BHDDH has statutory authority for children's substance use, adult mental health and substance use, and has the specialized expertise for administering comprehensive mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery services through decades of working with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

BHDDH has unique experience in planning and implementing behavioral health prevention services. In particular, BHDDH has administered the statewide network of community prevention coalitions (RI Substance Abuse Prevention Act) since its inception in 1987 and the RI Student Assistance Program since 1986. Prevention coalitions provide behavioral health prevention services to children and adults, including older adults. As such, BHDDH has the specialized expertise to provide comprehensive behavioral healthcare services across the lifespan.

BHDDH receives federal grants for behavioral health prevention and treatment which are utilized to provide services to children, youth, and adults. The Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Block Grant requires states to enforce the prohibition on the sale of tobacco products to underage individuals as a condition for receipt of the Block Grant. As the recipient of this Block Grant in our capacity as the SSA for substance use disorders, BHDDH is responsible for ensuring compliance with this requirement. Transferring responsibility for children's substance use services to DCYF would jeopardize these grants, many of which do not limit services by age.

Additionally, BHDDH holds the FDA contract to enforce the federal ban on underage tobacco sales which is coordinated with Synar compliance efforts. Separating these initiatives may cause disruption which also may jeopardize the FDA contract.

Loss of federal funding would severely impact the availability of substance use services. In this climate of federal funding uncertainty, we cannot afford to disrupt established and effective programs.

As you may be aware, our state partners at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) are currently responding to a Senate Resolution that asked for a report, and plan to move children's mental health services from DCYF to BHDDH, which is due April 1, 2025. EOHHS is in the process of completing the draft of the report.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Leclerc", written in a cursive style.

Richard Leclerc
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Elections
The Honorable Julie A. Casimiro
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy