



Communities for People

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March 6, 2025

TESTIMONY BEFORE HOUSE STATE GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE IN
SUPPORT OF H5718

Chairman Shanley, Vice-Chairs Messier and Corvese, and members of the Committee,

I am pleased to provide this testimony in support of H5718—a bill that goes a long way to clarifying the Legislature’s original intent to place responsibility, authority, and accountability for one state agency—in this case DCYF—for providing and coordinating a coherent and high quality array of children’s behavioral health services.

As the CEO of Communities for People, **we serve over 500 families annually** with a strong clinical team focused on preserving families, predominantly through multiple service contracts funded through DCYF. While the prevalence of families with children needing behavioral health services in our state is already high, **the overwhelming majority of the families we encounter have at least one child with behavioral health needs, often quite serious.**

Over the course of many years, perhaps decades, our state—once a model for children’s behavioral health services—has lost capacity and the children’s behavioral health system has weakened, become fragmented, and driven predominantly through managed care organizations. In an effort to contain costs, an admittedly important factor, the state has, by relying on MCO’s, lost its ability to oversee access, quality, and outcomes. DCYF has recently procured a wide array of high-quality family- and home-based services, many of these are focused on supporting children and their families.

This bill goes a long way to repairing the current fragmentation. Currently BHDDH maintains resources and expertise for adult behavioral health needs, but that focus does not include children and families nor direct service provision. I fear that, in the absence of this legislation, BHDDH could assume responsibility for Children’s Behavioral Health. While perhaps a seemingly simpler solution, I fear a well-known, nationwide experience that often, when children’s services become merged with adult services the children’s services weaken over time, simply because children do not vote nor possess an active political voice.

DCYF has done an admirable job of reducing out of home placements by strengthening families. Its noticeable shortcomings are indeed focused on the lack of community supports for intensive services that in turn result in youth being placed out of their homes and into either psychiatric hospitals or residential treatment centers out of state.

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Many of these deficits are not of the agency's own making, but rather our state's commitment to fund the services adequately and ensure accountability and oversight. While DCYF will require the resources to rebuild its capacity to oversee this continuum, this bill is crucial for ensuring that the current confusing and fragmented service array is either held by, coordinated by or governed by DCYF—the singular state agency responsible for children. It also ensures accountability as well.

DCYF was always intended to be THE primary agency for supporting children and their families. This bill re-affirms and strengthens its ability to do so. Please consider the bill favorably.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig D. Gordon", written in a cursive style.

Craig D. Gordon
Chief Executive Officer