



TURNING THE CORNER

RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT PROGRAMS

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley

Chair, House Committee on State Government and Elections
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for H5718

Dear Chair Shanley and Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of H5718, which seeks to formalize the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families' (DCYF) oversight of all matters related to children's behavioral health. This legislation is essential in expanding DCYF's role to administer comprehensive behavioral health services for children with serious emotional disturbances and developmental or functional disabilities. The passage of H5718 is critical to ensure that Rhode Island's children and youth receive the effective and coordinated behavioral healthcare they desperately need.

My name is Lauri Smalls, and I serve as the Executive Director of Turning The Corner Residential Treatment Programs in Providence, Rhode Island. Our organization provides trauma-informed residential services for youth, supporting some of the State's most vulnerable youth as they navigate significant emotional and behavioral challenges. We have seen first-hand the urgent need for a stronger, more integrated system of care for children's behavioral health services.

H5718 is essential in clarifying DCYF's responsibility in this area, ensuring a seamless continuum of care for children and youth in need of services. While DCYF currently oversees children's behavioral health, this bill formalizes the department's authority, ensuring it is equipped with the necessary resources and power to effectively manage and coordinate care. Without this framework, children with complex behavioral health needs continue to face gaps in services due to fragmented communication among various state agencies and providers.

Additionally, this bill prioritizes early intervention, coordinated wraparound supports, and ensuring that children receive services in the least restrictive environment whenever possible. Strengthening DCYF's role in behavioral health oversight will allow for a system that is accessible, trauma-informed, child-centered, and culturally responsive—all of which are critical components in delivering high-quality care to our most at-risk youth.

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We do not need a complete overhaul of the system—what we need is a commitment to investing in DCYF's capacity to effectively oversee children's behavioral health, and H5718 is a necessary step in that direction. At a time when federal policy changes are already creating shifts in funding and service delivery, restructuring the system now would result in additional delays and costs that Rhode Island cannot afford.

I urge you to support H5718 to ensure that every child in Rhode Island has access to the behavioral health services they need to thrive. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Lauri Smalls
Executive Director
Turning The Corner Residential Treatment Programs

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