



**TIDES FAMILY SERVICES**

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

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Tidesfs.org

March 12, 2026

The Honorable Susan Donovan  
Chairwoman  
House Health and Human Services Committee  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: H 7919 – Youth Behavioral Health Family Navigation Guide - Oppose as Drafted**

Dear Chairwoman Donovan:

On behalf of Tides Family Services, I am writing to express our appreciation for the Committee's ongoing work to strengthen Rhode Island's behavioral health system for children and families. We share the goal reflected in House Bill 7919 of helping families better understand how to access behavioral health services for their children. Improving navigation of the system is an important objective for families who are often trying to find support during difficult and stressful circumstances.

However, we respectfully ask the Committee to consider how this proposal aligns with Rhode Island's existing statutory framework for children's behavioral health. House Bill 7919 would require the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) to develop and maintain a statewide youth behavioral health family navigation guide intended to help parents understand and navigate the system.

Under Rhode Island law, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) holds primary responsibility for the children's behavioral health system. Rhode Island General Laws § 42-72-5 and § 42-72-5.2 establish DCYF's authority to develop and oversee the continuum of children's behavioral health programs and coordinate services designed to meet the needs of children and families. These statutes reflect the longstanding policy that children's behavioral health services should be organized through a coordinated system of care centered within DCYF.

In addition, Rhode Island recently entered into a federal Children's Behavioral Health Consent Decree resolving findings by the U.S. Department of Justice regarding the state's treatment of youth with behavioral health disabilities. That decree requires the State—through DCYF—to review and strengthen Rhode Island's children's behavioral health service system, including improving access to community-based services and coordination of care for children and families.



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Given this statutory framework and the obligations imposed under the federal consent decree, we respectfully ask whether the development of a statewide youth behavioral health navigation guide would be more appropriately led by DCYF. Doing so could help ensure that the guide accurately reflects the structure of Rhode Island's children's system of care and aligns with the reforms currently underway as part of the consent decree.

Tides Family Services strongly supports efforts to make Rhode Island's behavioral health system easier for families to understand and access. We simply believe that aligning this initiative with the state's existing statutory responsibilities and ongoing system reforms will help ensure that families receive clear, consistent, and accurate guidance.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for your continued leadership on issues affecting children's behavioral health in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Beth Bixby  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tides Family Services