

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 the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, I am writing to express our concerns regarding House Bill 7919, which would require the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) to develop and maintain a statewide youth behavioral health family navigation guide.

The Coalition strongly supports efforts to help families better understand how to access behavioral health services for their children. Families often struggle to navigate Rhode Island's complex behavioral health system, and clearer guidance and accessible information would be beneficial.

Under Rhode Island law, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) holds primary responsibility for the children's behavioral health system and the coordination of services for youth and families. Creating a statewide guide intended to help families navigate that system should therefore be led by the agency responsible for administering it.

Additionally, as the state is addressing children's behavioral health to respond to the state's consent decree, we are entering a period of change and restructuring of services which may impact service delivery during the very development of such a guide. EOHHS has also initiated a website for Children's Behavioral Health (<https://kids.ri.gov/behavioral-health-resources>).

We would also raise a broader policy question regarding the need for this legislation. The creation of a family navigation guide is essentially a ministerial function—an informational resource that a state agency could develop and publish without the need for specific statutory authorization. If the goal is simply to provide families with clearer information, it is not clear why legislation is required.

For that reason, the Coalition respectfully asks the Committee to consider either opposing the legislation or amending it to remove BHDDH as the responsible agency and instead designate DCYF to lead the development of any statewide youth behavioral health navigation guide, potentially in collaboration with other state agencies.

Rhode Island is currently working to strengthen and coordinate its children's behavioral health system. Any legislative action in this area should reinforce, rather than blur, the lines of responsibility established in state law and the children's system of care.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to this issue and would welcome the opportunity to work with you on approaches that improve access to behavioral health services for children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas Meyer
Executive Director