

Representative Susan R. Donovan, Chairwoman  
House Health and Human Services Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

March 9, 2026

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

I am writing to express support for House Bill 8134 that would allow ambulance services to be reimbursed for transporting patients in behavioral health crisis to crisis stabilization centers and other appropriate behavioral health facilities, rather than only to hospital emergency departments.

Emergency medical services frequently respond to calls involving individuals experiencing mental health or substance use crises. In many of these cases, a hospital emergency department is not the most appropriate or effective setting for care. Crisis stabilization centers are specifically designed to provide rapid assessment, de-escalation, and short-term behavioral health treatment. Allowing ambulance transport directly to these facilities will connect individuals to the most appropriate care more quickly in a while promoting engagement and preserving dignity.

Current reimbursement structures often limit payment to transports ending at hospital emergency departments. As a result, ambulance providers may be forced to transport patients to emergency rooms even when a crisis stabilization center would be the more clinically appropriate destination. Aligning reimbursement policy with clinical judgment will help ensure that patients are taken to the right place for the care they need and will support our full continuum of community-based crisis services through the 988 Lifeline, mobile crisis and MRSS teams, and our crisis receiving and stabilization center BHLink.

Permitting reimbursement for these transports will reduce strain on hospital emergency departments, which are already facing significant overcrowding and frequently serve as holding areas for patients awaiting behavioral health services. Diverting appropriate patients to crisis stabilization centers helps preserve emergency department capacity for medical emergencies while improving access to specialized behavioral health care.

Additionally, crisis stabilization services are far less costly than emergency department visits. Supporting direct transport to these facilities can therefore improve care while helping to reduce overall healthcare system costs. Transports to these facilities also would not increase transportation costs for health plans, as they already cover ambulance transports to hospitals.

I also strongly support the provision in the bill allowing licensed clinicians to accompany ambulance transports when clinically appropriate. Having a trained behavioral health professional present during transport can help stabilize individuals in crisis, improve safety for both the patient and EMS personnel, and ensure continuity of care on arrival.

However, I respectfully ask that the bill also recognize Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs) under Rhode Island mental health law as eligible to accompany these transports. QMHPs are state-recognized crisis workers with specialized training and experience in responding to behavioral health emergencies, and allowing them to ride along when appropriate would expand the availability of qualified crisis responders while supporting the bill's goal of connecting patients to the most appropriate care.

This legislation represents an important step toward building a more effective, patient-centered crisis response system and ensuring that emergency medical services can deliver individuals in crisis to the most appropriate setting for care.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to improving access to behavioral health services in our communities.

Sincerely,



James DiNunzio  
Chief Executive Officer  
Horizon Healthcare Partners