



TIDES FAMILY SERVICES

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

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3/30/2026

The Honorable Susan Donovan, Chairwoman
House Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H7994 – Protecting Children’s Mental Health Services - SUPPORT

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express strong support for H7994, legislation that is critically important to maintaining a stable, effective, and child-centered mental health system for Rhode Island’s children and families.

At its core, H7994 preserves and reinforces the Department of Children, Youth and Families’ (DCYF) longstanding authority over children’s behavioral health services. This authority is not incidental—it is foundational to ensuring that services are tailored to the unique developmental, clinical, and family needs of children. Recent efforts to shift this responsibility to the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), and to integrate children’s services into an adult behavioral health system, risk undermining this carefully constructed framework.

Importantly, Rhode Island’s current system of care for children is also shaped by federal consent decree obligations, which require the State to provide coordinated, community-based, and developmentally appropriate mental health services for children. DCYF’s central role is integral to meeting these obligations. Any effort to dilute or transfer that authority risks placing the State out of alignment with federal requirements and jeopardizing compliance with the consent decree.

Children are not simply smaller adults. Their needs require specialized expertise, coordination across education and family systems, and a system of care that is explicitly designed for youth. Fragmenting or transferring this responsibility threatens continuity of care, weakens accountability, and risks creating gaps in services for some of our most vulnerable populations.

H7994 ensures that DCYF remains the lead agency responsible for children’s mental health services, preserving a system that is child-centered, family-driven, and developmentally appropriate.

We have also proposed a set of technical amendments to strengthen the bill. These amendments:

- Clarify that services are intended for all children;
- Align terminology by replacing “behavioral health” with “mental health” for greater clinical clarity;
- Establish qualified clinical leadership within DCYF, including a Medical Director and a children’s mental health expert;



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- Strengthen provider standards to ensure services are delivered by appropriately licensed and trained professionals; and
- Reinforce coordination with BHDDH while maintaining DCYF's primary authority over children's services.

These changes are technical in nature but important in ensuring the bill is clear, implementable, and aligned with best practices in children's mental health systems.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support H7994.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Rhode Island's children and families.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Bixby, LICSW
Chief Executive Officer
Tides Family Services