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March 30, 2026

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

RE: H7994 — SUPPORT

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of Community Care Alliance, I am writing in support of **H7994**.

Rhode Island is at a pivotal moment. Through the ongoing federal consent decree, the State is on the verge of building a more robust, community-based children's behavioral health system. One that is designed specifically to meet the unique developmental needs of children and families timely and effectively. This progress reflects years of work and a shared commitment to doing better for Rhode Island's children.

As this system takes shape, it is critical that we strengthen, not disrupt, this momentum. H7994 would help the state take an important step by reaffirming the central role of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) in leading and overseeing the children's behavioral health system. Maintaining strong leadership and accountability within DCYF is essential to ensuring continuity, compliance with the consent decree, and a sustained focus on child-centered care.

Community Care Alliance is the regional Community Mental Health Center as well as the Community Action Program for Northern Rhode Island. With nearly 50 programs, our aim is to help stabilize families and prevent them from falling deeper into the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice systems. As a service provider for DCYF, our Family Community Care Partnerships (FCCP) is the primary prevention program created to stabilize and support families. In order to achieve this, FCCP coordinates care for families connecting them to essential behavioral health and substance abuse treatment services.

Article 8 (Sections 1 and 2) and Article 10 (Section 2), would further consolidate behavioral health authority under the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH). While coordination across systems is important, shifting authority away from DCYF risks undermining the progress we have made and could reduce accountability at a critical time. DCYF has a robust understanding of the needs, challenges, and complexities that at-risk families present with. Shifting behavioral health authority to a different state department would be detrimental, as it does not consider the social determinants of health that impact child and family functioning. DCYF's more holistic approach to working with families is a superior approach versus the often medically modeled version supported by BHDDH.

Children's behavioral health is not simply a smaller version of the adult system. It requires specialized services, family engagement, and a prevention-focused approach that reflects the distinct needs of children. Preserving clear leadership and accountability within DCYF helps ensure these needs remain front and center.

We respectfully urge you to support H7994 to reinforce DCYF's leadership role; and carefully reconsider any budget language that would shift authority away from DCYF during this critical implementation period.

Rhode Island has an opportunity to build a system that truly works for children and families. We must stay the course and reaffirm our commitment to the consent decree and the progress already underway.

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

Sincerely,

Mark B. Cote, LMHC.MPA
Director of Child Welfare
Community Care Alliance