



**Key[®]
Program, Inc.**
*Unlocking Potential
of Youth & Families*

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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 Key Program, Inc., 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.

Key Program Inc. provides a continuum of supportive services for children, families and young adults via DCYF in Rhode Island, DCYF in New Hampshire and DCF in Massachusetts. Our experience, particularly in Massachusetts, is with a state system in which Children's Behavioral Health and child welfare services are bifurcated between two different state agencies, Department of Mental Health and Department of Children and Families respectively. This bifurcation has led to significant challenges in service design, licensing requirements, medication regulations and payment structures that are influenced primarily by adult populations disregarding the unique differences in serving minors. These challenges have also made it difficult for children and families involved with the child welfare system to get timely access to behavioral health services that are often critical to reducing risk of child abuse and neglect.

At the same time, we have serious concerns with proposals in the Governor's FY2027 budget; specifically, **Article 8 (Sections 1 and 2) and Article 10 (Section 2)**, which 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.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tammy Mello". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Mello
President and CEO
Key Program, Inc.