

Together for Children. Families. Communities.

March 30, 2026

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

RE: H7994 – The Powers and Scope of DCYF- Protecting Children’s Mental Health Services - SUPPORT

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, I am writing in strong support of H7994.

This legislation addresses a fundamental question about how Rhode Island organizes and delivers mental health services for children: whether those services remain within a system designed specifically for children and their families or are absorbed into a broader adult behavioral health framework.

Rhode Island has, over time, established a statutory structure that places responsibility for children’s mental health services within the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). That structure reflects an important policy judgment- that children’s needs are distinct and require a system of care that is developmentally appropriate, family-centered, and integrated with education, child welfare, and community-based supports.

DCYF’s statutory authority is central to maintaining that system. It ensures there is a clearly accountable lead agency responsible for coordinating services, managing care, and aligning the various systems that touch a child’s life. Without that clarity, systems can become fragmented, responsibilities blurred, and families left to navigate complexity on their own. Unfortunately, language in budget articles (Articles 8 & 10) and legislation would transfer increasing authority to BHDDH.

From the perspective of our Coalition members, who work directly with children and families across Rhode Island, the effectiveness of the system depends on this structure. A children’s system of care cannot simply be layered onto an adult behavioral health model without losing the coordination, specialization, and responsiveness that children require.

There is also a significant federal dimension to this issue. Rhode Island is subject to federal consent decree requirements governing the delivery of children’s mental health services. These requirements call for a coordinated, community-based system of care that is specifically designed for children and delivered in the least restrictive, most appropriate settings. DCYF’s role as the lead agency is integral to meeting those obligations.

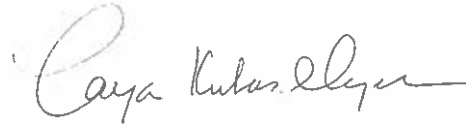
Maintaining a clearly defined, child-centered system of care is not only sound policy- it is essential to ensuring continued compliance with federal requirements and to avoiding disruption to services that children and families depend on.

H7994 reaffirms this structure and provides important clarity at a time when it is needed most.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support this legislation and to preserve a system of care that is organized around the needs of children and families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tanja Kubas Mayer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tanja Kubas Mayer

Executive Director

Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families