



4/9/2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma  
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Executive Office of Health and Human Services-Governor's FY 2027 Budget

Chairman Louis DiPalma and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of the Governor's FY27 proposed budget for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI) strongly supports Secretary Richard Charest and his team in their mission to foster and strengthen a community-driven, equitable, comprehensive, responsive, and high-quality health and human services system for all Rhode Islanders.

As one of the eight Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) in Rhode Island, FSRI sees firsthand the growing demand for accessible, high-quality behavioral health services across the lifespan. Our state, like many others across the country, continues to face a significant and ongoing mental health and substance use crisis. According to National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five Rhode Islanders experiences a mental illness each year, with more than 216,000 adults in our state living with a mental health condition. Additionally, the Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook reports that 30% of children enrolled in Medicaid had a mental health diagnosis in 2024. These data points underscore the urgent and sustained need for a robust, coordinated behavioral health system that meets individuals and families where they are.

CCBHCs are a cornerstone of Rhode Island's behavioral health continuum. Through the establishment of FSRI's CCBHC, we have significantly increased access to both mental health and substance use disorder treatment and have more than doubled the number of individuals served. We have expanded services for individuals impacted by substance use, strengthened care coordination and care management, and enhanced engagement strategies that ensure individuals remain connected to care.

Through our CCBHC, FSRI has also created a Recovery Drop-In Center that provides individuals with access to job search support, basic needs assistance, peer recovery services, and life-saving naloxone distribution. These services are designed not only to stabilize individuals in crisis but to support long-term recovery, independence, and community integration. The CCBHC model allows providers like FSRI to respond flexibly to emerging needs, reduce barriers to treatment, and deliver whole-person care that addresses both behavioral health and social determinants of health.

In addition, FSRI's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based behavioral health interventions. Since launching in 2021, MRSS has served more than 1,000 families across Rhode Island and achieved a diversion rate of over 90% from emergency department visits and law enforcement involvement. This means that children and families experiencing behavioral health crises are receiving timely, trauma-informed care in their homes and communities, rather than entering higher-cost and often more disruptive systems of care. These outcomes not only improve family stability and youth well-being but also reduce strain on emergency departments, hospitals, and law enforcement resources.

Beyond these examples, FSRI's CCBHC has strengthened access to integrated behavioral health care for children, families, adults, and older adults, expanded same-day access to services, increased workforce capacity, and enhanced coordination with community partners including schools, hospitals, primary care providers, and social service agencies. These efforts are helping to build a more responsive and sustainable behavioral health system across Rhode Island.

Continued investment in CCBHCs through the Governor's FY27 proposed budget is critical to maintaining this momentum. Sustained funding ensures that providers can continue to expand access, support workforce recruitment and retention, enhance crisis response services, and maintain the high-quality, evidence-based care that Rhode Islanders deserve.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support the Governor's proposed funding for CCBHCs and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. These investments are essential to ensuring that all Rhode Islanders, regardless of age, income, or circumstance, have timely access to comprehensive, high-quality behavioral health care.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to strengthening Rhode Island's behavioral health system.

Sincerely,

*Sarah Kelly-Palmer*

Sarah Kelly-Palmer, LICSW  
Chief of Behavioral Health  
Family Service of Rhode Island