



Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness

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March 10, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Murray
Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
82 Smith Street, Room 211
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Murray and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, I write in support of Senate Bill S2886, which would establish a joint commission to study ways to maximize revenue for child welfare and children's behavioral health services in Rhode Island.

Across Rhode Island, housing instability and homelessness are deeply interconnected with the behavioral health and well-being of children and families. When families cannot access timely behavioral health supports, the consequences often ripple across multiple systems – including child welfare, housing, healthcare, and education. Strengthening and stabilizing these services is essential not only to improving outcomes for children but also to preventing family crises that can ultimately lead to housing instability or homelessness.

S2886 represents a thoughtful step toward ensuring Rhode Island is fully leveraging available federal and state funding streams to support these critical services. Too often, states leave federal resources untapped due to fragmented funding structures or administrative barriers. A coordinated review of financing opportunities can help Rhode Island strengthen its child welfare and behavioral health systems while making the most of existing resources.

Rhode Island's system of care for children and families depends on a complex mix of federal and state funding streams. As the state moves forward with ongoing Medicaid and fiscal transformation efforts, it is critical that policymakers examine how these changes may affect children's behavioral health services, child welfare programs, community-based providers, and family support systems.

For many years, Rhode Island has relied heavily on Medicaid to finance children's behavioral health services. While Medicaid remains an essential and indispensable source of support for medically necessary care, it was not designed to fund the full continuum of prevention, early intervention, and family stabilization services that help keep children safe and families strong.

Many states address this challenge by utilizing a broader mix of federal funding sources — including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Title IV-B, Title IV-E, Social Services Block Grants, and Family First Prevention Services Act resources — alongside state investments and dedicated prevention funding such as Children’s Trust Funds. Diversifying funding streams allows states to strengthen prevention systems, support families earlier, and ensure that Medicaid resources remain focused on clinical services for children who need them.

This issue is particularly important at a time of increasing uncertainty surrounding federal Medicaid policy and long-term funding stability. A thoughtful review of how Rhode Island coordinates and maximizes federal resources across agencies can help ensure the state is drawing down all available funding while maintaining a stable and effective continuum of care.

We support the bill’s creation of a cross-sector legislative commission that brings together policymakers, state agencies, providers, and experts to examine these issues, identify barriers to accessing federal funds, and recommend strategies to maximize revenue while protecting services for children and families.

For families already facing economic hardship, access to comprehensive behavioral health and supportive services can be the difference between stability and crisis. By strengthening coordination and ensuring Rhode Island is maximizing available resources, this legislation has the potential to improve outcomes for children while reinforcing the broader safety net that helps keep families housed and supported.

The Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness strongly supports efforts that address the root causes of housing instability and strengthen the systems that serve vulnerable families.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to support S2886.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colby J. O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light gray rectangular background.

Colby J. O'Brien
Executive Director
Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness