



TIDES FAMILY SERVICES

WE NEVER GIVE UP ON A KID... NEVER!

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May 1, 2024

Via Email Only

The Honorable Marvin Abney, Chairman
Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee
Room 35
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H7494 SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing to you today in support of H7494 to address the critical shortage of qualified behavioral health professionals by allowing community-based organizations to bill Medicaid for services provided by graduate student interns under supervisory protocols. We have witnessed firsthand the challenges posed by this shortage, particularly in communities that are already underserved. Many of our home-based programs had an average waitlist time of 3 months. Some children were on waitlists for over 6 months. By the time some of these children were able to be assigned, many families declined services, ended up in higher levels of care, or we could not reach families to begin services.

This shortage not only leads to access challenges for individuals seeking services but also exacerbates existing disparities in access to care. In our experience, it has been especially challenging to find child-competent and bilingual clinical staff who are interested in providing home-based care. The ability to bill Medicaid for services provided by graduate student interns would significantly enhance our capacity to address these unmet needs and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations.

By allowing services provided by these interns to be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement, this bill incentivizes their participation in clinical training programs, thereby increasing the pool of qualified professionals available to meet the growing demand for services. By enhancing their clinical skills and fostering a sense of commitment and dedication to serving their communities, this bill ultimately strengthens the behavioral health workforce in the long term.



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This could also help alleviate this issue by expanding the pool of providers who can deliver culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services to Medicaid beneficiaries, thereby improving access to care and reducing health disparities. Through our internship program, Tides has been able to increase our number of service providers by an additional 14, the number of BIPOC service providers by 7, and the number of bilingual service providers by 5 in the past year alone. **Of the 14 interns graduating this spring, 13 have accepted paid positions with our organization.** The internship program has become an invaluable resource for recruiting future service providers in our community. It is imperative that we continue to invest in programs that encourage and help recruit students into the mental health and behavioral health field in order to guarantee the continuation of services for the hardest-impacted communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth A. Bixby, LICSW

Beth Bixby, MSW, LICSW
CEO Tides Family Services