

April 1, 2025

RE: Executive Office of Health and Human Services Budget

Chairwoman Tanzi and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Executive Office of Health and Human Services budget. We are at a pivotal moment in government that offers an opportunity for deep analysis and consideration of how to maximize resources in both the public and private sectors to ensure that the state retains a health and human service safety net for its children, youth, and families.

The forty-four members of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) include key providers of children's behavioral health care as well as child welfare, domestic and family violence services, early childhood, special education, disability, and other services. Our members have close working relationships with and support the work of the office. We have three areas of comment:

Children in Crisis Can't Wait

RICCF's recent report Children in Crisis Can't Wait: The Case for System Transformationⁱ highlights the challenge of children's behavioral health as it is currently spread across seven agencies of the state. We believe that a children's system of care is critically needed and that it should be based at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families which has expertise in child and family systems work as well as 24/7/365 service infrastructure to service as the center of a no wrong door system for entry to care.

We appreciate the critical work that EOHHS has done in administering SAMHSA grant funding and identifying resources to address gaps toward a children's system of care. Responsibility for actual delivery of children's behavioral health services; however, is outside the statute of the Secretariat. None of the many financing and coordinating duties of EOHHS outlined in RI Gen L § 42-7.2, includes provision of direct services to children, youth, and their families as would be required for the entity charged as the center of the system of care.

Achieving Fiscal Transformation

Services to children, youth, and their families rely on a mix and braiding of public and private funding sources. We understand and are working closely with EOHHS and DCYF on the transition of new contracts through the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to a mix of direct Medicaid billing and continued partial Department billing. Such a transformation, however, will require state and organizational investments in the capacity of providers to achieve.

The administrative systems needed to fully support transition -including sufficient Electronic Health Record hardware/software, billing personnel and quality assurance staff and systems -exceed the current capacity of both small and larger agencies. The current uncertainty regarding funding of the Medicaid program will make it even more difficult for members to commit to new rates and new system investments in the coming year. Successful fiscal transformation will require state investments

in provider capacity – both in agency level technology and staff investments as well as systems investments- that are not currently accounted for in any state budget. RICCF has a working committee on Medicaid Transformation ready to engage with the state to assess and plan for these needs in addition to conversations already underway.

Contingency Planning

Finally, the challenges to EOHHS on behalf of all the human and health services agencies within its portfolio will be extreme in the coming months. Medicaid along with other key resources to families and funding sources for systems are all increasingly likely to see severe cuts. RICCF offers its service delivery expertise to EOHHS to assist in contingency planning and ensure that we maximize investments across the public and private sectors to the benefit of our children, youth, and families.

We thank you for your consideration of these priorities for the EOHHS budget and planning for FY '26.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas-Meyer
Executive Director

ⁱ Children in Crisis Can't Wait: RICCF, October 2024: www.riccf.org/data-publications