



3/19/24

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan
Chair, House Committee on Health and Human Services
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for H-7874

Chair Donovan and Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment **in support of H-7874, which requires private insurers to cover mental health crisis mobile response and stabilization services.** FSRI is in full support of this bill but we urge the bill to include language to specify that this service is for youth up to age 18. We also ask that a Medicaid rate be established as a floor to ensure that private insurance companies will establish rates to reasonably cover the service.

My name is Sarah Kelly-Palmer, and I am a Vice President at Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI). FSRI is a health and human service organization with the mission “to advance equity, hope, and opportunity in our communities.” We support children, individuals and families across the state with our 25 plus programs and services. As part of my role, I oversee the FSRI’s Youth Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS), as well as our Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC). FSRI is a federally-funded CCBHC (via the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - SAMHSA), and is also one of the Rhode Island State CCBHC Infrastructure Grant awardees, set to “go live” this October 2024.

FSRI has been one of the two providers of Children’s MRSS services in Rhode Island since November, 2022. The MRSS program is a crisis intervention model of care that is considered best practice in our field. MRSS is designed to respond to children and youth who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. We offer face-to-face crisis assessments in the home, community, school, or wherever the family is comfortable, 24/7/365. The MRSS model is designed to deploy both a clinician as well as a case manager or peer specialist in an effort to ensure the child and family receive as much support as possible during and after the crisis. Most of the time we are able to respond in-person within an hour of the initial call for assistance. What is unique about the MRSS model is that in addition to the crisis assessment, all children and families who access our program are offered up to 30 days of follow-up clinical services. These follow-up services act as a bridge for the youth until they can be enrolled in an appropriate clinical service. As you can imagine, with the current crisis we are experiencing in children’s behavioral health, this service has been a lifeline for many children and families who have not been able to access care when they need it most. Our referrals mostly come from families themselves as well as schools. Many school departments have incorporated MRSS into



their wellness protocols, so that when a student who is struggling at school needs assistance, schools have an alternative to call rather than calling 911 for an ambulance.

To date, this program has diverted 92% of the children and youth who have received this service from hospitalization or a higher level of care. We know that this model of care is working. Funding for this program is set to expire this fall when the program will be part of the CCBHC roll-out. Programs like this should not rely on state and Medicaid funding only. Not all children who will need this service will be CCBHC clients, that is why we are asking you to support this bill so that the MRSS program can be part of a larger continuum of care for all Rhode Island children.

It is imperative that the Medicaid rate established should be the minimum rate that this program is reimbursed at. This will ensure that private insurers offer reasonable rates that actually cover the cost of this essential service

The MRSS service is designed to respond to children and youth up to the age of 18 to divert from costly hospitalizations or high levels of care. Eight states have passed similar legislation requiring that private insurers reimburse for MRSS services. Let's make Rhode Island the ninth state to do so!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support on this important legislation, and please feel free to contact me with any questions or follow-up.

Thank you,

Sarah Kelly-Palmer

Sarah Kelly-Palmer
Vice President