

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DISABILITY RIGHTS RHODE ISLAND AND ACLU OF RHODE ISLAND CALL UPON RI  
LEGISLATURE TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR  
VULNERABLE CHILDREN, NOT MORE RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITIES**

Multiple investigations – by the Office of the Child Advocate, Disability Rights Rhode Island, the RI Attorney General, and now the U.S. Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services – have exposed a long-standing pattern of abuse and neglect of children with behavioral health disabilities in the state of Rhode Island. As these practices come to increasing public scrutiny, Disability Rights Rhode Island and the ACLU of Rhode Island strongly encourage all state parties and other decision-makers to effectively utilize this necessary opportunity for righting the current course and establishing a long-term solution for children.

That long-term solution is robust funding and utilization of comprehensive community-based services, provided in homes and schools, that prevent crisis and support children where they live; services and supports that are inexcusably insufficient in our state.

“The Department of Justice report is a wake-up call to the state that it cannot build its way out of its obligations to care for vulnerable youth in the state,” said Steven Brown, Executive Director of the ACLU of Rhode Island. “Instead, it is essential that the focus turn to more effective community-based resources.”

“This long-standing issue harms the most vulnerable children and represents a violation of their legal rights,” said Morna Murray, Executive Director of Disability Rights Rhode Island. “The time has come for the state to comprehensively correct this injustice.”

To quote U.S. Attorney Zachary Cunha, “It’s not an issue of not enough beds.” Study after study shows that care in settings like hospitals, psychiatric residential treatment facilities, like St. Mary’s Home for Children, and other residential settings harm children who are already in crisis. Children treated in these settings, particularly when they experience extended stays instead of being timely discharged to a community setting, experience physical and emotional abuse, over-medication, trauma, and rehospitalization at higher rates. Their long-term success, in school and in life, is diminished.

Moreover, the financial burden of these residential settings is astronomical compared to the costs of serving children in the community. The state is paying tens of millions of dollars for purported remedies

that have exacerbated harm to children, while not funding, or underfunding, proven community-based and family-focused interventions that will help children.

As we state in our [letter](#) today to House Leadership and the Committee on Finance, we call upon state government and the RI General Assembly to address this crisis in an effective and timely manner.

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