



NH Children's  
Behavioral Health  
Collaborative

January 30, 2019

The Honorable Mel Myler, Chair  
House Education Law Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 207  
33 North State Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Re: HB 677, relative to discipline of students, addressing students' behavioral needs, and making an appropriation therefor

Dear Chairman Myler and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The New Hampshire Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative ("CBHC") appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB 677, relative to discipline of students, addressing students' behavioral needs, and making an appropriation therefor.

The CBHC is a diverse network of individuals and organizations who work in partnership to transform the way we support children with behavioral health needs. The Collaborative supports state-level policy changes to transform New Hampshire's children's mental health and substance use disorder system into an integrated, comprehensive System of Care that is youth and family driven, community-based, and culturally and linguistically competent.<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to RSA 135-F, the New Hampshire Departments of Education and Health and Human Services are directed to work together to develop an integrated and comprehensive service delivery system for children with behavioral health needs, including the "[d]evelopment of a multi-tiered system of supports in New Hampshire schools."<sup>2</sup>

As we all know, the ongoing mental health, substance misuse, and child protection crises have taken a significant toll on New Hampshire's children and our schools are at the front lines. Schools are challenged daily to support the behavioral health needs of students while promoting academic achievement for all students. As a solution, many New Hampshire school districts are using an evidenced-based prevention framework to support the behavioral health and wellness of all students, called MTSS-B or Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavioral Health and Wellness. Section 2 of this bill recognizes the need to support students *and* schools and provides financial support for school districts to implement the MTSS-B prevention framework.

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<sup>1</sup> A System of Care is a value- and evidence-based behavioral health framework for system reform that is designed to pull together disparate service entities into one organized, coherent response. Research shows that the System of Care approach is a smart investment that brings better outcomes for youth, as well as their families and communities. *See generally*, "The Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children with Serious Emotional Disturbances Program, Report to Congress 2015."

<sup>2</sup> *See* RSA 135-F:5



### **What is MTSS-B?**

The MTSS-B model is an evidence-based prevention framework to support New Hampshire students' social, emotional, and behavioral health needs. It has been implemented in many school districts in New Hampshire and has demonstrated clear evidence that high-fidelity implementation of the model is directly correlated with reduced exclusionary discipline shown through reduced student discipline referrals, enhanced behavioral health, enhanced attendance, improved academic achievement, and enhanced school climate.<sup>3</sup>

### **What does MTSS-B look like in a school?**

The MTSS-B framework offers school districts a coordinated strategic approach that consists of 1) a school wide system of evidence-based behavioral practices for all students, 2) a targeted system of practices for youth who need additional support, and 3) a tertiary system of intensive and individualized interventions for students with the greatest behavioral needs. The framework does not prescribe a particular strategy or curriculum for school districts, but rather offers school districts the ability to choose what works for their own communities.

### **Why do we need additional funding for MTSS-B?**

The New Hampshire Department of Education's Bureau of Student Wellness serves as the primary driver of the MTSS-B framework at the state-level and there are many school districts that have received federal funding to implement the model with fidelity. However high-fidelity implementation of MTSS-B requires considerable investment of resources at the local level and is dependent on key implementation drivers including training; ongoing coaching; monitoring, evaluation, and data-based decision-making; system-level administrative support, and reliable funding and human resource capacity.

### **Why invest in MTSS-B now?**

Many New Hampshire schools struggle with the complex social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. Failure to meet these needs not only affects academic achievement – it can also result in negative outcomes such as behavioral issues, mental health crises, substance misuse, and dropping out of school. Addressing these needs has never more important and requires more than quick fixes. The MTSS-B prevention framework is an important tool for school districts to manage these challenges in a coordinated and strategic way.

Expansion of MTSS-B was recommended in the 1) 10 Year Mental Health Plan<sup>4</sup>; 2) 2018 report of the Governor's School Safety Preparedness Task Force<sup>5</sup>; and 3) the recent report issued by the NH Juvenile Reform Project "Keeping Kids in School: The Urgent Need for Reform of School

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<sup>3</sup> See attached MTSS-B Evaluation Reports from Antioch University, Center for Behavioral Health Innovation.

<sup>4</sup> See page 25, available at <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bbh/documents/10-year-mh-plan.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> See pages 26-29, available at <https://www.governor.nh.gov/news-media/press-2018/documents/20180705-school-safety-report.pdf>.



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Discipline in NH.”<sup>6</sup> It is also an integral part of building a coordinated and comprehensive System of Care as required under RSA 135-F.

We believe HB 677 is a sensible solution to a complex problem and adequately balances the rights of children and parents with the complex challenges schools face on a daily basis. Therefore, as a collaborative of families, youth, behavioral health clinicians, school representatives, behavioral health providers, advocates, and others, we strongly urge the committee to vote ought to pass on HB 677.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or need additional information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Whitley", is positioned below the word "Respectfully,".

Rebecca G. Whitley, Esq.  
Policy Director  
NH Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative  
New Futures

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<sup>6</sup> Available at [http://nh4youth.org/sites/default/files/attachments/page/keeping\\_kids\\_in\\_school\\_-\\_the\\_urgent\\_need\\_to\\_reform\\_school\\_discipline\\_in\\_nh.pdf](http://nh4youth.org/sites/default/files/attachments/page/keeping_kids_in_school_-_the_urgent_need_to_reform_school_discipline_in_nh.pdf)