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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND
HOSPITALS -- MENTAL HEALTH LAW

Introduced By: Representatives Furtado, Casimiro, McGaw, and Alzate

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House Health & Human Services

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 40.1-5 of the General Laws entitled "Mental Health Law" is hereby
2 amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **40.1-5-44. Youth behavioral health family navigation guide.**

4 (a) Establishment. The department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities and
5 hospitals ("the department") shall develop, publish, and maintain a single, statewide, plain-
6 language youth behavioral health family navigation guide to assist parents and legal guardians in
7 understanding how to access and navigate the youth behavioral health system.

8 (b) Required content. The guide shall, at a minimum, include:

9 (1) Pre-diagnosis information, including:

10 (i) Age-appropriate early warning signs and emotional or behavioral indicators;

11 (ii) General guidance distinguishing developmentally typical behavior from indicators
12 warranting professional evaluation;

13 (iii) Support strategies that families may implement while awaiting evaluation or treatment,
14 including emotional regulation and coping skills;

15 (iv) Information describing the roles of pediatricians, schools, behavioral health providers,
16 and other professionals in screening and evaluation; and

17 (v) Guidance on how to discuss behavioral health concerns with a child in a
18 developmentally appropriate and supportive manner.

1 (2) Post-diagnosis information, including:

2 (i) Descriptions of common levels of care, including inpatient, outpatient, partial

3 hospitalization, crisis stabilization, and community-based services;

4 (ii) Pathways for accessing care through private insurance, public insurance, and options

5 available to uninsured or underinsured youth;

6 (iii) General information regarding referrals, care coordination, documentation commonly

7 requested for services, and basic legal rights and protections applicable to youth receiving

8 behavioral health services; and

9 (iv) Statewide crisis response contact information.

10 (3) Crisis framework. The guide shall include a structured framework to assist families in

11 assessing and responding to behavioral health crises, including:

12 (i) A description of varying levels of functional impairment;

13 (ii) Examples of common crisis scenarios and recommended steps;

14 (iii) General guidance regarding circumstances in which access to care is delayed or denied,

15 including system-capacity limitations or insurance denials; and

16 (iv) Regionally specific crisis resources.

17 (c) Regional resource information. The department may incorporate within the guide

18 regionally specific behavioral health resource information including, but not limited to, municipal

19 services, school district programs, designated community behavioral health centers, hospitals, and

20 nonprofit providers. The structure, organization, and substantive framework of the guide shall

21 remain uniform and under the sole authority of the department.

22 (d) Distribution and updates. The department shall:

23 (1) Publish the guide prominently on its website in a downloadable and printable format;

24 (2) Update the guide no less than annually;

25 (3) Make the guide available for distribution to pediatric healthcare providers, public and

26 private schools, community behavioral health centers, nonprofit behavioral health organizations,

27 and other appropriate stakeholders; and

28 (4) Ensure accessibility in accordance with applicable state and federal law.

29 (e) Nature of guide; limitation of liability. The guide shall be informational in nature and

30 shall not constitute medical or legal advice. Nothing in this section shall be construed to create a

31 private right of action against the state, the department, or any employee thereof.

32 (g) Construction. Nothing in this section shall be construed to create an entitlement to

33 services, to alter eligibility requirements established by law, or to expand the regulatory authority

34 of the department beyond that otherwise provided by law.

1 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND
HOSPITALS -- MENTAL HEALTH LAW

- 1 This act would require the department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities
- 2 and hospitals to publish a statewide guide to the youth behavioral health system.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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