



July 8, 2025

The Honorable Robyn Kennedy  
Chair, Joint Committee on Children,  
Families, and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 312-D  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Jay Livingstone  
Chair, Joint Committee on Children,  
Families, and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 146  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Liz Miranda  
Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Children,  
Families, and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 413-C  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Judith Garcia  
Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Children,  
Families, and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 146  
Boston, MA 02133

*Submitted via email*

**RE: Testimony regarding S.141/H.265 *An Act Regarding Families and Children in Need of Assistance***

Dear Chair Kennedy, Chair Livingstone, Vice Chair Miranda, Vice Chair Garcia, and and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Children's Mental Health Campaign (CMHC), thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of S.141/H.265, *An Act Regarding Families and Children in Need of Assistance*, filed by Senator Kennedy and Representative Mendes. The CMHC is a large statewide network that advocates for policy, systems, and practice solutions to ensure all children in Massachusetts have access to resources to prevent, diagnose, and treat mental health issues in a timely, effective, and compassionate way. The CMHC Executive Committee consists of six highly reputable partner organizations: the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC), Boston Children's Hospital, Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Health Care For All, Health Law Advocates, and the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health.

We are grateful to the Committee for its attention to how the Commonwealth responds to children and families in distress. Current Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) practices often rely on court involvement as a first resort for issues such as school absenteeism or behavioral concerns, despite mounting evidence that this approach does not address the underlying challenges children face, and may in fact cause harm. Research shows that court involvement for truancy and similar issues is not an effective intervention. Rather than improving outcomes, it can increase the likelihood of school disengagement, dropout, and deeper system entanglement. These are avoidable consequences when we have more effective, community-based resources readily available.

Over 98% of families served by Health Law Advocates' Mental Health Advocacy Program (MHAP) for Kids report facing at least one barrier to accessing mental health care. These systemic failures, whether due to insurance denials, agency gaps, or adversarial responses from school districts, disproportionately impact Black and Latino youth. When these children are denied services and pushed into court, we compound the harm and miss opportunities for effective intervention. Court involvement should never be a substitute for access to services.

S.141/H.265 proposes a much-needed and commonsense reform. The bill requires school districts to refer families to their local Family Resource Center (FRC) and allow at least 45 business days for community-based interventions before filing a CRA petition. Upon CRA filing, schools must obtain an attestation from the FRC that these steps were taken.

Family Resource Centers are already trusted community hubs across the Commonwealth, offering families access to behavioral health referrals, educational advocacy, and help with basic needs. Relying on their role, before court becomes involved, is both logical and life-changing. MHAP for Kids, working alongside FRCs, has shown that early legal and advocacy support improves access to services, reduces emergency department usage and psychiatric hospitalizations, and helps stabilize families.

This legislation reflects a shift from punishment to prevention. It affirms that children's behavioral challenges are best addressed through support, not stigma. It empowers families, leverages existing infrastructure, and aligns with best practices in child development, trauma-informed care, and community-based intervention.

We respectfully urge the Committee to report S.141/H.265 favorably. It is a smart, commonsense policy that strengthens our response to children in need and ensures that court intervention remains a last resort.

Thank you for your leadership and for your ongoing commitment to the well-being of children and families in Massachusetts. For any questions or further discussion, please contact Courtney Chelo at [cchelo@mspcc.org](mailto:cchelo@mspcc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney Chelo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Courtney Chelo  
Director of Government Relations, MSPCC  
On behalf of the Children's Mental Health Campaign