

May 8, 2024

RE In Support of H7905- Relating to State Affairs and Government- Tuition Waiver Pilot Program for Youth in Foster Care

Chairman Abney, Vice Chairs Slater and Marszalkowski and members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our strong support for the initiative outlined in **H7905- Relating to State Affairs and Government- Tuition Waiver Pilot Program for Youth in Foster Care** and further specified in the Governor's FY '25 Budget Amendment 12 that would meet the tuition, housing, and food costs for a minimum of ten and as many as 20 former foster youth.

The Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) is comprised of forty-three member organizations who provide and advocate for family strengthening and support resources, comprehensive child and family services including: behavioral health, special education, juvenile justice, domestic violence, sexual assault, and healthcare services; foster care and residential treatment programs, and a strong and effective human services workforce.

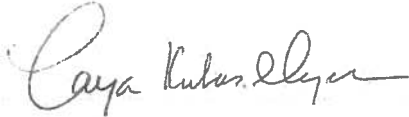
The majority of our members work in some capacity on behalf of foster youth, and all are deeply concerned about the failure of our systems to ensure that youth are able to remediate learning loss and finish high school. Our worst fears were realized when we learned from the first RIDE report on foster youth academic outcomes that only some two-fifths or 43% of foster youth have graduated from high school since 2010. Highschool and college are necessities in the current economy, and we absolutely want youth to have the opportunity to go on to college and beyond and achieve their academic potential.

According to the National Foster Youth Institute, "For those who are able to enroll in higher education, living expenses, reliable housing, access to technology and highspeed internet, and help navigating the complexities of the academic world are all barriers to completing a degree. This may result in former foster youth attending college later in life or taking longer than four years to complete a degree. Homelessness and the foster care to prison pipeline also disrupt or end dreams of completing college."

The tuition waiver program would provide up to 20 former foster youth with a full tuition scholarship for up to four years or if part-time, the financial value of the total cost to obtain a degree or certificate at Rhode Island College. Importantly youth making progress would be able to continue to pursue higher education up to age twenty-six.

The pilot program is small, but each grant will be deeply meaningful to the individual student in supporting and encouraging their college dreams. There are many actions that will be needed to change the educational trajectory for youth in care but initiating the tuition waiver program at RI College is a critical investment in the futures of young people who are ready for college. We thank you for your consideration and urge your support of H7905.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tanja Kubas-Meyer".

Tanja Kubas-Meyer
Executive Director