



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

May 8, 2024

Thank you, Chair Abney and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 7905 which would establish the tuition waiver program for children in Rhode Island foster care with the purpose of increasing the number of youth in foster care enrolling in and obtaining degrees in a timely fashion from a state college or university.

My name is Katelyn Medeiros and I am the Acting Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Acting Director of the agency which serves as the oversight to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). As part of our role as the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

The National Foster Care Institute estimates that approximately 20% of youth exiting foster care at age 18 become homeless. While the Voluntary Extension of Care Program aims to improve overall outcomes for youth age 18 to age 21, we can do more to support young people in preparation for adulthood.

Nationally, children and youth involved in the child welfare system can experience instability in both living and school environments. Students in foster care are at a higher risk than their peers of low academic achievement, grade retention, and lower graduation rates. In Rhode Island, we know that students in the care of DCYF graduate at a rate of only 49% compared to 84% of all students. Our most vulnerable students deserve the educational supports needed to set them up for long-term success.

Educational achievement and success is a powerful counterweight to the trauma, separation, abuse, neglect, and instability experienced by children and youth involved in the child welfare system. Unfortunately for students living in out-of-home placement, the financial resources, mentorship, support, stability, and guidance needed to complete postsecondary education or training programs are not commonly accessible. Students who are able to enroll in post-secondary education, living expenses, reliable housing, access to technology and high-speed internet are all barriers to completing a degree. Ensuring that students in out-of-home placement have wrap around educational supports can ensure education is a top priority and can help students stay on track with their educational goals and milestones, leading to hirer paying jobs and housing stability.

My office supports House Bill 7905 to directly address the financial burden of higher education for students living in out-of-home placement. Thank you for your continued support for children and families involved with the child welfare system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katelyn Medeiros".

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.
Acting Child Advocate



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Thank you, Chair Abney and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Budget Amendment #12 which includes \$1.0 million in State Fiscal Recovery Funds, which will be distributed by the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner to the Rhode Island College Foundation, to support a last dollar scholarship program for Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) foster care youth exiting the system to attend Rhode Island College and would fully fund tuition, room and board, and/or support services.

My name is Katelyn Medeiros and I am the Acting Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Acting Director of the agency which serves as the oversight to DCYF. As part of our role as the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

Nationally, children and youth involved in the child welfare system can experience instability in both living and school environments. Students in foster care are at a higher risk than their peers of low academic achievement, grade retention, and lower graduation rates. In Rhode Island, we know that students in the care of DCYF graduate at a rate of only 49% compared to 84% of all students. Our most vulnerable students deserve the educational supports needed to set them up for long-term success.

Educational achievement is a powerful counterweight to the trauma, separation, abuse, neglect, and instability experienced by children and youth involved in the child welfare system. It is important that we provide ample opportunity for young people to access higher education and postsecondary opportunities to prepare them for adulthood. Accessing tuition and wraparound postsecondary supports through the Foster Care Youth Scholarship will help young adults stay on track with their educational goals and milestones, leading to higher paying jobs and housing stability.

My office supports Budget Amendment #12 to directly address the financial barriers to higher education for students exiting the system to attend Rhode Island College. Thank you for your continued support for children and families involved with the child welfare system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katelyn Medeiros".

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.
Acting Child Advocate