



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Representative Marvin L. Abney
Rhode Island State House
RI House Finance Committee Chairman
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 20, 2025

Dear Representative Abney,

I am writing to express my opposition to the Office of the Child Advocate's proposal to move the RI Educational Surrogate Parent Program from the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. At no time has the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) made any attempt to contact my office to discuss consolidation and/or the need for improvements related to the RI Educational Surrogate Parent Program.

The Sherlock Center has successfully implemented the RI Educational Surrogate Parent Program for the past 23 years. Currently, the program provides surrogate parent services to 614 students with disabilities in the care and custody of RI Department of Youth and Families (DCYF). The program has consistently met or exceeded the goals set by the state consent decree to provide services to students with disabilities in the care and custody of DCYF. Graduation rates for students supported by the program have consistently exceeded 85%.

As Rhode Island's University Center of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities, the Sherlock Center is an invaluable resource to the Educational Surrogate Parent Program and to the special education and disability communities throughout the state. The Sherlock Center's expertise and status as a neutral vendor allows the Rhode Island Department of Education to meet its statutory obligations under federal law to provide quality and conflict-free surrogate parent services.

Rhode Island College acknowledges the concerns raised by OCA and appreciates its efforts to advocate for the education, care and health of children in the care and custody of the state. Rhode Island College, along with the Sherlock Center, posits the issues related to the achievement gaps and limited outcomes of children in foster care are complex and require a comprehensive statewide approach allowing all involved to 1) understand the issues influencing these outcomes, and 2) to collaboratively work across state agencies to put in place strategies to improve the experiences and outcomes of children in the care and custody of the state. Rhode Island College has been and continues to be committed to working collaboratively with all state agencies and community organizations to address these issues.

I ask that you do not approve the consolidation proposal. I also ask for your support for the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities to continue implementing the RI Educational Surrogate Parent Program.

Jack Warner

President
Rhode Island College