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

March 27, 2025

Dear Representative Abney,

I would like to share additional information about the Sherlock Center's Educational Surrogate Parent Program with you and the RI House Finance Committee Members. This information is supplemental to my letter in opposition of the proposal made by the Office of the Child Advocate to move the Educational Surrogate Parent Program from the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities/Rhode Island College to the Office of the Child Advocate.

1). Qualifications of the Staff

Surrogate Parent/Educational Advocates have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. 100% of the employees in this program have a bachelor's degree. They can be in a related field such as psychology, human development, justice studies. 43% master's degrees, including business administration, English and psychology. 15% are currently enrolled in Master's Degree Program for Public Administration. Individuals in role come into the position with a variety of experiences including, but not limited to working as a case manager, a teacher, an educational advocate and/or having experience with the educational system as a parent.

In addition, upon starting, the Surrogate Parent advocates receive training related to IDEA regulations and processes. They work alongside a mentor surrogate parent until they are comfortable transitioning into their own caseload. The caseload builds across the year depending on their level of experience in schools and with special education. During this transition, they continue to work closely with a mentor. All advocates have ongoing professional development and access to technical assistance from an attorney.

2) Five years of data related to number of students served, graduation rates and activities of Surrogate Parents.

Table 1.0

Number of Students Served in DCYF Care, and Students in DCYF Care by Surrogate Parent/Education Advocates

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Total # of Students in DCYF Care	3632	3531	3428	3334	3284
Total # Served by Surrogate Parent/Educational Advocate Program	717	745	688	746	724
Percentage of Students in DCYF Care Served by Surrogate Parent/Educational Advocate Program	19.7%	21%	20%	22%	22%
New Referrals During the Year	197	142	242	321	220

Table 2.0

Graduation Rates of Students Served in the Sherlock Center's Surrogate Parent Education Program

Surrogate Parent/Educational Advocate Active Student Cases	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Total # Eligible for Graduation	16	17	32	34	35
Total # Graduated	16 (100%)	17 (100%)	31 (97%)	34 (100%)	35 (100%)
Graduated Upon Completion of Senior Year	4	4	18	19	20
Graduation Upon Completion of Transition Programing*	12	13	13	15	15
# Did Not Graduate			1		

*Students who meet academic requirements for graduation and continue programming with educational system beyond 4 years to complete transition goals.



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Table 3.0

Services Provided by Surrogate Parent/Educational Advocates

Services Provided by Surrogate Parent/Educational Advocate	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
IEP Meetings	495	485	480	470	489
School conferences	569	409	456	538	569
Evaluation meetings	241	198	185	204	241
Manifestation meetings	29	4	27	23	29

I appreciate your questions and interest in learning about the program through the data. I am happy to answer any additional question you have regarding the program.

Thank you,

Amy Grattan

Amy Grattan, PhD

Executive Director, Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College

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Testimony on House Bill 5076
An Act Making Appropriations for The Support of the State
for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026

March 27, 2025

The Education Surrogate Parent Program is operated out of the Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. This program provides pivotal advocacy for student's with (or suspected of) needing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 plan. Surrogate Parents are appointed by the Rhode Island Department of Education and perform the role of a parent in special education matters. This includes referring student's for evaluations, attending IEP and 504 meetings, review educational records, and work with teachers and other school staff.

We recently became aware of testimony in HHS Subcommittee to remove the Surrogate Parent Program from the Sherlock Center and RIC. Because this testimony was not in the Education Subcommittee, we were not aware of it until some time after.

We have some significant questions if there were to be any change in the administration of the program. Is there an educational reason for the move? Is the program adequately funded? What were the metrics of success being sought? Are they being met? How many DCYF kids have a learning disability? What percentage leave school with a diploma? How does that compare to national averages? How does it compare to the total DCYF population and to all kids with an IEP or a 504 plan in RI? In US? Are the shortfalls related to Education issues/plan denials or DCYF issues (e.g. poor attendance, frequent relocation across districts, trauma, etc.)?

As an advocacy organization, we want to ensure that all kids with disabilities receive the best education possible and have an individual advocate to guide them through the process.

Sincerely,

Kevin Nerney, Executive Director