



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony Re: House Bill 7823, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government -- Department of Children, Youth and Families
House Committee on Health & Human Services
March 5, 2024
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would also like to thank Representative Casimiro for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Roberts, Noret, Serpa, Solomon, Cruz, Diaz, and Alzate for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 7823, which would require the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to conduct periodic comprehensive needs assessments to determine whether the department's programs and services meet the needs of children and families in their care, assess client accessibility, collect data to develop goals and measurable objectives for new and existing programs and services, and would also create a committee to advise the Department in conducting this important comprehensive needs assessment.

Comprehensive needs assessments are part of best practice measures to ensure programs are functioning as intended, identify possible barriers and challenges, and set priorities for future actions. An evaluation of DCYF's child welfare, juvenile justice, and children's behavioral health programs and services will be an important tool for DCYF to regularly assess the needs of these vulnerable populations to ensure the services are adapting as needed to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. A regular needs assessment will also inform efficient allocation of funding to programs that work and the procurement of new programs based on the findings of the assessment.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is thankful to be named as one of the committee members to provide collaboration and advice or guidance to DCYF in the needs assessment process. We also support the inclusion of two designees with lived experience in the child welfare system as key stakeholders on this advisory committee (including at least one youth or parent). We would recommend that an individual (youth or parent) with lived experience in the juvenile justice system as well as the children's behavioral health system be appointed to the committee as well.

Appropriate supports and services can help youth in care maximize their potential and ensure that they are prepared for their future success. We urge passage of House Bill 7823, which would require an evaluation DCYF's service array through a comprehensive needs assessment to be completed before each re-procurement period and no longer than every five years, to ensure the Department's programs and services are meeting the needs of children and families in their care. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.