



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

March 5, 2024

Thank you, Chair Donovan and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 7823 which will 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 the care of the Department, assess client accessibility and collect data to develop goals and measurable objectives for new and existing programs and services. The act would also create a committee that shall advise the entity conducting the comprehensive needs assessments.

My name is Katelyn Medeiros, and I am the Acting Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), 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.

Children involved in the child welfare system are some of our most vulnerable youth, having experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect, and in some cases requiring out-of-home placement at a residential facility, group home, or with a foster family. As advocates, it is our job to ensure that the children involved in Rhode Island's child welfare system have the appropriate services and programming available to ensure they receive the care and support they need to flourish.

Rooted in social work best practice, this bill will require DCYF to complete periodic needs assessments, with advice from a committee of individuals with lived experience and child welfare experts, to ensure the Department is regularly assessing the needs of the children they serve on an ongoing basis. Conducting needs assessments on an ongoing basis is critical to analyzing changes in the population over time so our system can be equipped to address changing needs over time.

A comprehensive needs assessment will be a valuable tool for DCYF to identify the specific needs of the populations across child welfare, children's behavioral health, and juvenile justice and measuring outcomes of existing services that are supporting the populations as well as identify gaps in services that may require procurement. Upon completion, a needs assessment will be a valuable tool to aid the Department's approach to efficient use of funds and future budget requests for procurement of needed services and supports and staffing needs.

The Office of the Child Advocate would like to express how thankful we are to Representative Casimiro for sponsoring and to Representatives Roberts, Noret, Serpa, Solomon, Cruz, Diaz, and Alzate for co-sponsoring this bill. Thank you for your commitment to improving outcomes for our most vulnerable youth.

My office supports passage of House Bill 7823, and we thank you for your continued support for children and families involved with the child welfare system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katelyn Medeiros". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.
Acting Child Advocate