



April 1, 2025

The Honorable Representative Robert Craven, Sr.

Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee Members

House Lounge

State House

Providence, RI 02903

RE: HB5260

Dear Chairman Robert Craven, Sr. and members of the committee,

On behalf of Tides Family Services, I am writing in strong support of **H5260**. This legislation amends Rhode Island General Law 14-1-6 and would extend the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) Program to children who are wayward and delinquent and in the juvenile justice system; and children who attain reunification prior to their 18th birthday, however the reunification is not successful. This significantly expands those youth eligible for the Voluntary Extension of Care Program. Currently youth who are adjudicated wayward or delinquent, that is, most likely involved in the juvenile justice system are not eligible for participation in the Voluntary Extension of Care. Also, currently those youth who are not in foster care prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and possibly reunified are not eligible to elect participation in the Voluntary Extension of Care Program. Currently, any young adult who was in DCYF care on their 18th birthday is eligible for the VEC program until they reach age 21. This includes any youth who may have left DCYF care and now wishes to return. However, the current law excludes youth in the juvenile justice system and those who were reunified and not in care of the Department.

The DCYF VEC program's goal is to support young people in becoming self-sufficient, independent, and thriving adults. The program is youth-driven where the young adult, with the assistance of a social worker, works on setting their own goals for housing, education, employment, emotional support systems, and future success. DCYF provides financial assistance for housing as well as money to help with the youth's personal needs throughout their participation in this program.

Through the VEC Program, young adults receive guidance and assistance with developing and implementing a transition plan; Identifying, securing, and maintaining an appropriate supervised living arrangement (SLA); the receipt of cash assistance for help with rental costs and assistance



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with daily living expenses; accessing other supportive services for which the young adult might be eligible such as SNAP, cash assistance, heating assistance, WIC, Child Care Assistance Program, and more. The VEC program staff work with young adults to identify educational needs and goals. Supports may include educational planning, applying for college financial aid, accessing on-campus programs, and identifying potential internship opportunities, and more. The Vec program staff assist in developing and supporting a career plan based on the young adult's choices including referrals for vocational/ career assessment, connections to workforce training programs, and employment opportunities. In addition, the VEC program staff assist the young adults to navigate use of health coverage to access needed medical and behavioral healthcare support. This is tremendous assistance for young adults turning the age of 18 and in need of this type of assistance.

According to the DCYF Strategic Metrics Dashboard dated March 21, 2025 which is provided by DCYF to Providers, there are currently 95 youth participating in the Voluntary Extension of Care program under the current eligibility guidelines. The DCYF data indicates that there are currently 226 youth in juvenile probation and 35 youth at the Rhode Island Training School. By expanding eligibility for VEC to the juvenile justice population there are potentially over 200 additional youth who now would be eligible for significant additional assistance in navigating everyday life as well additional cash assistance in certain areas.

This additional over 200 youth does not include those youth who were reunified prior to turning 18 where that reunification disrupted. This means even more youth eligible for VEC.

We urge you to support this legislation which would expand eligibility for young adults so that they would be entitled to the very valuable programming and support the VEC program provides for young adults.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth A. Bixby, LICSW  
Chief Executive Officer