



April 01, 2025

To: The Honorable Representative Robert Craven, Sr.
Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee
House Lounge
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HB5260

From: Shannon Skaling, MSW, LCSW; Assistant Clinical Director; Tides Family Services

As an Assistant Clinical Director of Tides Family Services, I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of Rhode Island Senate Bill H5260 for Voluntary Extension of Care Funding for youth involved with the Juvenile Justice System prior to their eighteenth birthday. 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.

At Tides Family Services, we work with some of the most vulnerable youth in our state—those involved in child welfare, juvenile justice, and children's behavioral health systems. Part of my role at Tides is to oversee our Youth Transition Center program (YTC). YTC is a unique collaboration between Tides Family Services, the Department of Children, Youth and Families ("DCYF") and the Rhode Island Training School ("RITS") for male and female youth, aged 13 to 19 living in Providence, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, and the surrounding communities. YTC helps youth to prepare for release from the RITS or meet the conditions of their probation. It emphasizes responsibility and prevention strategies to avoid re-entry into the Juvenile Justice system.

During my time at Tides, overseeing YTC and other home-based clinical services, I have seen a lot of transitional-aged youth reach adulthood without appropriate supports that set them up for success. We work hard prior to each youth turning 18 to help them access any needed resources, including but not limited to identification, education, employment, housing, and other basic needs to be successful in adulthood. However, this is a big ask for any young person, even if they have family support and resources. A lot of our youth have had multiple placement disruptions during their lives, have limited family support, and have had to make difficult decisions out of a need to survive. This legislation would mean that youth in these situations would have options for being able to extend their time with formal support in order to access resources, develop additional skills, and set their lives up for success away from formal systems. In my opinion, this would significantly decrease recidivism and help prevent involvement in the adult juvenile justice system. That is why I am imploring you to support H5260.

While Tides is able to do targeted work with this at-risk population, one of the significant gaps in service delivery is the lack of access to Youth Development Services (YDS) for juvenile justice involved youth.



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215 Washington St.
West Warwick
Rhode Island, 02893
Main Office - 401-822-1360
Fax - 401-823-4694
Tidesfs.org

Under the current legislation, only children who are involved with the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) Act or the Family Services Unit (FSU) at DCYF are able to access these services. Despite DCYF being the oversight body to the RI juvenile justice system, they are not able to access valuable resources through VEC, such as job training and readiness programming, GED services, enhanced case management, and mentor services. All of these are necessary resources for children reintegrating into their communities and preventing recidivism or involvement with the adult corrections system. Every year, YDS youth participate in a graduation ceremony to recognize their achievements in graduation, GED completion, job training, or citizenship. This is a celebration that fosters connection and promotes motivation for youth who lack support in their natural support systems. Juvenile Justice youth do not have the ability to participate in this celebration unless they are also FSU involved. There is a great deal of crossover between VEC and JJ youth, and access to these YDS services is critical for both populations. I implore you to support H5260.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shannon Skaling, MSW, LCSW
Assistant Clinical Director
Tides Family Services
215 Washington St
West Warwick, RI 02893