



**Written Testimony in Support of H5922
Relating to Delinquent and Dependent Children – Proceedings in Family Court**

April 1, 2025

Dear Chair Craven, First Vice Chair McEntee, Second Vice Chair Knight, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann and I am the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Youth Justice Network (NYJN), a membership organization comprising 73 state-based organizational members and nearly 100 Youth Justice Leadership Institute (YJLI) members and alumni in 42 states across the country, including Rhode Island. NYJN works towards our vision of community-based, healing-centered justice.

On behalf of NYJN, **we urge the committee to vote in support of H5922** which establishes safeguards for youth during custodial interrogations. H5922 prohibits a peace officer or a school resource officer from employing threats, physical harm, deprivation, deception, coercion, or psychologically manipulative interrogation tactics during the custodial interrogation of a juvenile.

For decades, research and real-world cases have demonstrated that children and teenagers are particularly vulnerable during interrogations. Unlike adults, youth have less developed decision-making abilities, are more susceptible to coercion, less likely to understand their rights, and more prone to falsely confess—all of which can have life-altering consequences.

A coerced confession can lead to incarceration, loss of education, employment barriers, and a lifetime of stigma. Even youth who never go to trial may face consequences such as loss of housing, school expulsion, or inability to secure financial aid.

Because youth are more suggestible than adults, they are more likely to go along with leading questions or change their answers under pressure.¹ Whether at the police station or in school,

¹ Megan Crane, Laura Nirider & Steven A. Drizin, The Truth About Juvenile False Confessions, 16 INSIGHTS ON L. & SOC'Y 10, 12 (2016).

youth are taught to respect and obey authority, making them more likely to believe what law enforcement tells them—even when it is false.

As a result, youth are two to three times more likely than adults to falsely confess.² Many youth do not realize they can refuse to answer questions. In high-pressure interrogations, youth often say what they think officers want to hear just to make the questioning stop, rather than assert their innocence.

Several states have already implemented protections during the custodial interrogation of young people: Illinois, Oregon, Utah, Delaware, and California have all passed laws restricting the use of deception of youth during custodial interrogations, and other states are considering similar measures. In Colorado, Indiana, and Nevada, a youth's statements are inadmissible if deceptive tactics have been used.

We strongly urge you to support H5922 so that the state of Rhode Island is better positioned to prevent wrongful convictions, increase fairness in the legal system, and uphold constitutional protections for young people.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Coretz Goemann
Senior Policy Counsel

² Ariel Spierer, Note, The Right to Remain a Child: The Impermissibility of the Reid Technique in Juvenile Interrogations, 92 N.Y.U. L. REV. 1719, 1731 (2017).