



## Testimony Re: Department of Children, Youth and Families Budget

House Finance Committee

July 30, 2020

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Governor Raimondo's proposal to increase Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) staffing to provide an additional four (4.0) FTEs for Child Protective Services (CPS).** In 2019, DCYF received 19,401 unduplicated maltreatment reports, and after investigation found that 2,249 of these reports indicated that abuse and/or neglect were present. From 2009 to 2019, the number of CPS reports increased almost 60% (from 12,189 reports in 2009 to 19,401 reports in 2019). It is crucial that DCYF have enough FTEs to investigate these reports and determine if child well-being is in jeopardy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a dramatic decline (45% decline from April 2019 to April 2020) in calls to DCYF's child protection hotline because children and youth have been largely out of contact with mandated reporters, such as teachers, school personnel, child care workers, and pediatricians. When school re-opens this fall, there is expected to be a steep increase in child protection hotline calls, and DCYF will need the proposed increase in staffing to thoroughly investigate the reports and determine if abuse and/or neglect are present.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also strongly supports Governor Raimondo's proposal to increase DCYF staffing to provide an additional 14.0 FTEs to support recruitment, training, licensing, and retention of foster families, including kinship foster families.** Since the beginning of 2020, DCYF has successfully shifted children in out-of-home placement from congregate care settings, such as group homes and hospitals, to foster families, including kinship foster families. As of late June 2020, DCYF reported that 83% of children and youth in out-of-home placement were in foster families, and only 17% were in congregate care facilities. This shift toward more children living in foster families is critical because children and youth who live with families while involved with the child welfare system are better prepared to thrive in permanent homes reached through reunification, adoption, or guardianship.<sup>1</sup>

As a data-based children's policy advocacy organization, **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports the Governor's proposal to borrow \$17.0 million to replace DCYF's child welfare data system (RICHIST) that has been in place since 1997.** Total funding for this new system would be \$28.2 million, including \$11.2 million from federal funds. Having a new

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<sup>1</sup> Every kid needs a family: Giving children in the child welfare system the best chance for success. (2015). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

data system will enhance DCYF's ability to ensure the safety of children and youth in its care by supporting DCYF staff to input and access information in real time while working with children and youth in the field. As a community partner, we rely heavily on this data to publish the annual [Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook](#), including all of the indicators in its [Safety Section](#), and other [child welfare publications](#) that help the state understand how children in the care of DCYF are faring and make data-informed decisions about the policies and practices that can improve child and youth outcomes.