



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

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**Testimony Re: DCYF and the System of Care, Phase Two  
Senate Committee on DCYF and the Family Care Networks  
September 16, 2014**

**Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Family Care Networks. From its initial inception, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has supported the principles of DCYF's System of Care transformation, including its focus on prevention, family preservation, early intervention, and providing services in the least restrictive environment.

We are concerned, however, that budget cuts have made it difficult for the Family Care Networks to carry out the principles of the initial system design. The implementation of the Family Care Networks came on the heels of significant reductions in DCYF's budget. The agency's budget was reduced by nearly \$40 million between FY 2009 and FY 2012, from \$250.0 million to \$210.9 million. DCYF's annual budget has remained at approximately \$211 million since the networks were established in July 2012.

One of the goals of the initial System of Care concept was to reduce Rhode Island's rate of children placed in congregate care, which has consistently been among the highest in the country. The Family Care Networks were designed to establish a structure for team decision-making, wrap-around services, and providing a continuum of residential and home-based services. Despite the efforts of providers and DCYF, the child welfare system has struggled to shift resources away from residential services towards home and community based services.

Contributing to the challenges, DCYF and its contracted providers have not had the funds to proactively focus on prevention and scale up programs that have been documented to help prevent child maltreatment and preserve families. This includes not only the introduction of new evidence-based programs but also increasing funding for existing home and community-based programs that are showing positive results. Home and community-based services are often significantly less expensive than residential placements but budget pressures have not allowed the Department any flexibility to fund new programs, creating a system that spends too many resources reactively on treatment and rehabilitation, rather than prevention and early intervention.

**Recommendations:**

While we understand system change takes time, we think that there are several areas that could be prioritized that would improve the child welfare system's ability to respond the needs of children and families in Rhode Island:

***Focus on Prevention***

Many states have realized that investing in prevention ultimately leads to lower utilization of "high-end" residential placements and saves money over the long term. We believe that not enough resources are allocated to preventing at-risk families from child welfare system involvement in Rhode Island. The Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCP's), the hallmark of the System of Care's child

abuse and neglect prevention strategy, sustained an \$850,000 budget cut this year.

### ***Improve Services for Infants and Toddlers***

Nationally and in Rhode Island, young children are at an increased risk for child maltreatment compared with older children. In Rhode Island in 2013, children under age 6 represented 46% of all victims of child abuse and neglect. Young children who do not form healthy attachments to parents or caregivers are at an increased risk for a host of negative outcomes.

Whenever possible, DCYF should provide home-based family support services so that young children can be safely maintained in their homes. For infants and toddlers who must be placed in foster care, it is critical that they not be placed in group care settings. It is also vital that infants and toddlers in foster care move quickly towards permanency so that they are able to bond with a permanent adult caregiver and minimize the negative impact of being in placement.

### ***Support Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention***

Campaigns to recruit foster parents are sponsored by child welfare agencies in many states, but Rhode Island does not currently have a coordinated, statewide recruitment campaign. We recommend that DCYF develop a public relations strategy in Rhode Island to increase the number of families who consider fostering a child.

In addition, we recommend that the state increase the daily rates that foster parents are paid, which in many cases are not enough to cover the costs of caring for the child. Foster parents are providing a critical service to the state and are often preventing costly residential placement. DCYF should ensure that foster families do not endure financial hardship as a result of their decision to foster a child.

We also recommend that DCYF provide foster parents with additional opportunities for respite care so that they can have temporary relief from the taxing duties of being a foster parent. We believe this will prevent burn-out and improve foster parent retention.

### ***Support Adoption and Concurrent Planning***

Like foster parents, adoptive parents play a critical role in an effective child welfare system. DCYF should increase recruitment initiatives and raise public awareness of the benefits of adopting through the foster care system and increase financial subsidies and support to families who adopt from the child welfare system. In addition, DCYF should expand the practice of concurrent planning to simultaneously pursue permanency through adoption or guardianship should efforts at reunification fail

### ***Use Data and Evaluation to Fund Effective Programs***

It is critically important to use outcome data to evaluate how individual programs are performing. With limited resources, DCYF must fund programs and services that are effectively meeting the needs of children and families. Providers, working in conjunction with DCYF, must develop the capacity to measure outcomes and demonstrate that they are effectively meeting the needs of children. Recognizing the current fiscal situation, we see this moment as an opportunity for DCYF to prioritize effective, evidence-based programs and allocation of resources to ensure adequate capacity in the community-based services system for children involved with the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems.

### ***Use Data and Evaluation to Track System Progress***

Like all state child welfare agencies, DCYF is required to report annual data to the federal government on a standard set of performance indicators. The U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services compiles this information in its annual *Child Welfare Outcomes Report* which provides information on the performance of state child welfare systems in seven outcome categories during the federal fiscal year. The outcomes used in the report reflect widely accepted performance objectives for child welfare practice. DCYF currently contracts with The Consultation Center at Yale University to prepare Rhode Island's data for the annual report.

We recommend that these indicators be regularly reviewed by system stakeholders to monitor progress and ensure quality during the continued implementation of System of Care. The following is a list of the seven federal performance objectives:

- 1. Reducing recurrence of maltreatment**
  - *% of children who experience a recurrence of maltreatment within six months of a prior episode of maltreatment*
- 2. Reducing maltreatment in foster care**
  - *% of children maltreated while in foster care*
- 3. Increasing permanency for children in foster care**
  - *% of children who exit foster care to adoption, guardianship, reunification, or other status*
  - *% of children with a disability who exit foster care to adoption, guardianship, reunification, or other status*
  - *% of children over age 12 who exit foster care to adoption, guardianship, reunification, or other status*
  - *% of children who exit to emancipation (or "age out")*
  - *% of children who exit foster care to adoption, guardianship, reunification, or other status by race and ethnicity*
- 4. Reducing time to reunification without Increasing reentry**
  - *Time to reunification*
  - *% of children reentering foster care*
- 5. Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption**
  - *Time to adoption*
- 6. Increase Placement Stability**
  - *Number of placements by length of time in care*
- 7. Reduce Placement of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions**
  - *Most recent placement settings of children who entered care during the fiscal year and were age 12 or younger at the time of this placement*

In addition to reporting on these seven outcome categories, the federal *Child Welfare Outcomes Report* includes data on the frequency of child maltreatment, the numbers of youth entering and exiting foster care, and the numbers of youth waiting to be adopted. These data are already collected by DCYF and submitted to the federal government each year. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also includes much of these data in our annual Factbook and other publications.

We recommend that these contextual factors be regularly reviewed by system stakeholders to evaluate the child welfare system's performance:

- **Child Maltreatment**
  - *Children subject to an investigated report of maltreatment*
  - *Child maltreatment victims*
  - *Child fatalities*
  - *Demographics of victims*

- *Maltreatment type*
- **Children in Foster Care**
  - *Entries to and exits from foster care*
  - *Lengths of stay in foster care*
  - *Demographics of children in foster care*
- **Children Waiting to be Adopted**
  - *Children waiting to be adopted*
  - *Children whose parental rights have been terminated*
  - *Demographics of waiting children*

We thank the members of this Oversight Committee your attention to ensuring that children, youth, and families that are involved with DCYF get the services they need to thrive. We would be happy to provide any additional information and thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion.



## Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

### Presentation to the Senate Task Force on DCYF and the Family Care Networks

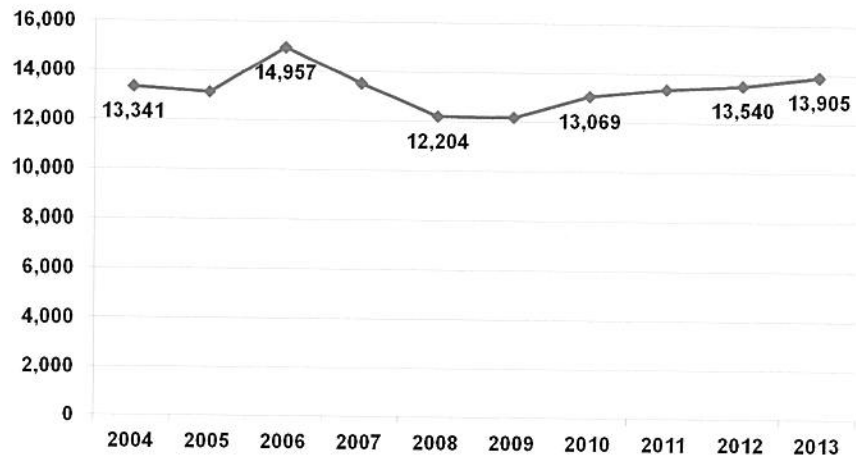
Elizabeth Burke Bryant,  
Executive Director

September 16, 2014



## Child Maltreatment Trends

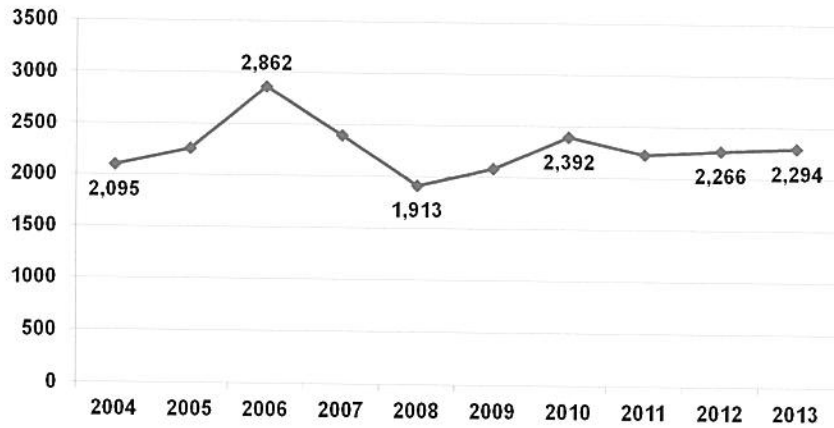
Unduplicated Maltreatment Reports, 2004-2013





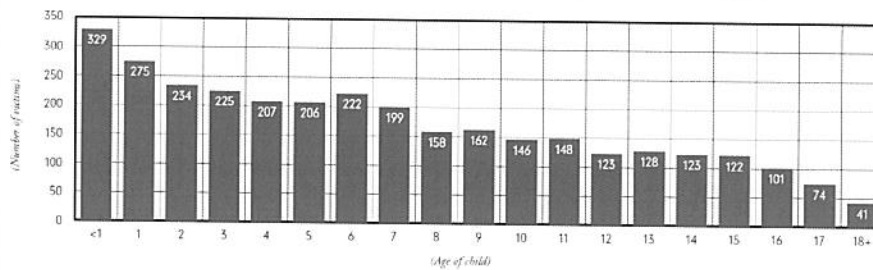
## Child Maltreatment Trends

Number of Indicated Investigations, 2004-2013



## Child Maltreatment by Age

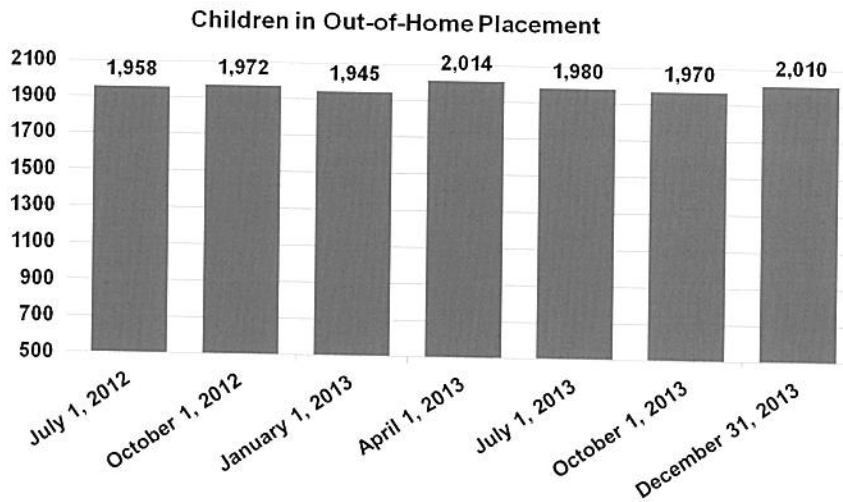
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY AGE OF VICTIM, RHODE ISLAND, 2013



- Young children are especially vulnerable to abuse and neglect.
- In Rhode Island in 2013, children under age 6 represented 46% of all victims of child abuse and neglect

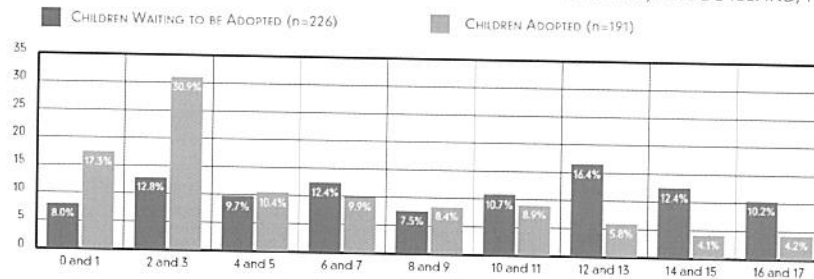


## Out-of-Home Placement Trends



## Children Waiting to be Adopted

AGES OF CHILDREN WAITING TO BE ADOPTED AND CHILDREN ADOPTED, RHODE ISLAND, FFY 2012

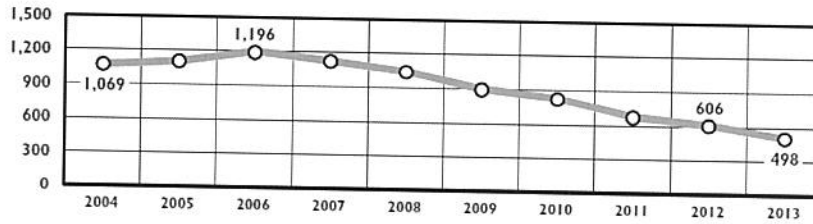


- On September 30, 2012 in Rhode Island, there were 226 children and youth in foster care waiting to be adopted. Of these, 132 children and youth waiting for adoption had birth parents whose parental rights had been terminated.
- Young children are more likely to be adopted from foster care than older youth. During FFY 2012, almost two-thirds (59%) of children adopted from Rhode Island's foster care system were under age six, while 14% were youth age 12 or older.



## Juvenile Justice Trends

Juveniles in the Care and Custody of  
the Rhode Island Training School, Calendar Years 2004-2013



- 498 youth were in the care or custody of the Training School at some point during 2013, down from 1,069 in 2004.



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