



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony Re: House Resolution 6156, Creating a Special Legislative Commission to Study Educational Outcomes for Children in State Care
House Education Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would also like to thank Representative Casimiro for sponsoring this important resolution and Representative Noret for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Resolution 6156 which would establish a Special Legislative Commission to study the educational outcomes for youth in state care.

Rhode Island children in foster care often experience multiple placements, lose contact with family members and siblings, and overwhelmingly have overlooked educational, physical, and mental health needs. Multiple, prolonged, and unstable placements can negatively affect children's long-term well-being and academic achievement. Historically, one-third of children in foster care experienced five or more school changes before they turned 18, and such changes often resulted in lost academic progress. However, now, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act includes provisions to give children in foster care more educational stability by allowing students to stay in their school of origin if it is in their best interest and providing transportation to that school.

As of the 2017-2018 school year in Rhode Island, data on reading and math proficiency and high school graduation for students in foster care is publicly available. Since this data was made available, we have a clearer picture of the disparate educational outcomes youth in foster care experience compared to their peers.

Educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of achieving reading proficiency by the end of third grade, when children begin to shift from learning *to read* to reading *to learn*. Students who do not reach this milestone struggle in later grades and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient peers. In Rhode Island in 2023, 37% of third graders and 32% of eighth graders met expectations on the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS), English language arts assessment. In the same year, only 19% of students in foster care in the third grade, and 10% of students in foster care in the eighth grade met expectations in reading. Similarly, only 14% of students in foster care in the third grade met expectations in math compared to 35% of their peers, and a striking **7% of students in foster care in the eighth grade met expectations in math compared to 23% of their peers.**

Equally troubling is the high school graduation rate among children in foster care. Among the Class of 2023, 84% of Rhode Island students graduated high

school in four years, compared to 51% of students in foster care, the lowest rate of any student subgroup. **Additionally, less than 1% of youth in foster care in Rhode Island obtain a college degree.** Within the next decade, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education. This would leave many youth who have experienced foster care disproportionately left out of economic advancement opportunities and financial security if they are unable to obtain a postsecondary degree. This poses both an individual and societal cost. We know that many youth who experience foster care possess the academic ability to succeed and the interest to pursue higher education, but face barriers to reaching their goals. As these youth are in the state's care, we have a responsibility to evaluate the disparate educational outcomes of students in foster care and create action steps to address the gaps in their academic achievement and improve their educational outcomes.

We urge you to pass House Resolution 6156, as we believe it is an important step to assess and eliminate barriers to academic achievement and will help improve long-term outcomes and experiences among our youth who have experienced foster care.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.