



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

May 7, 2026

Thank you, Chair McNamara and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 8462 which would require transition planning for high school students with disabilities, who have a 504 plan, like the transition planning required for high school students with disabilities, who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

My name is Katelyn Medeiros, and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight agency to DCYF. As the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

Students eligible for a 504 plan under Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* are students with disabilities that impact major life activities. Although these students may not require specialized education services, many still depend on meaningful, consistent support to access their education and reach their academic potential. Accommodations provided through a 504 plan are not optional enhancements, they are essential safeguards that ensure equitable access to learning alongside their peers. Effective implementation of these plans is critical to help the student flourish, as it ensures that educators and school personnel understand both the needs of the student and their legal obligation to provide appropriate support.

Codifying the inclusion of students with 504 plans in state law is a logical and necessary step toward equity. Transition planning has long been recognized as a cornerstone of success for students receiving special education services, helping them move confidently into employment, higher education, and independent living. The implementation of transition services for special education students has helped countless young adults successfully bridge the post-graduation period. This need is particularly urgent for students in state care, who often face heightened instability and disrupted school time. For these students, structured transition planning can serve as a stabilizing force for the development of essential life skills while outlining a clearer path toward independence. Without intentional inclusion, students with 504 plans, particularly those in state care, risk falling through the cracks when coordinated support is most crucial.

It is important to note that transition planning is already a well-established and effective component of the IEP process for students with special education needs at the secondary level. Adapting the existing framework for use with 504 plans represents a practical and efficient solution. It allows schools to leverage familiar processes without unnecessary administrative burden, while significantly strengthening outcomes for a broader population of students with disabilities. The OCA urges passage of House Bill 8462 expanding access

to transition services for students with 504 plans so they can benefit from the same structured preparation and opportunities afforded to their peers with IEPs.

Thank you for your continued support of students with disabilities, particularly those involved in state care in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katelyn Medeiros". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.
Child Advocate