



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02593
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1738 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: Governor's FY2025 Budget, Amendments to FY 2025
Appropriations Act: Governor's Budget Amendment #12
House Committee on Finance
May 8, 2024
Kelsey Bala, Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the section of the Governor's Budget Amendment #12 related to the Foster Care Youth Scholarship.

We would like to thank the Governor's Office for their continued support of one of our state's most vulnerable populations – our children in foster care. We are in support of the amendment to include State Fiscal Recovery Funds distributed by the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner to the Rhode Island College Foundation, to support a last dollar scholarship program for Department of Children, Youth, and Families youth in foster care to attend Rhode Island College. This funding, along with legislation that would create a tuition waiver pilot program at Rhode Island College, are needed to expand access and eligibility to postsecondary educational attainment and improve related outcomes for current and former foster youth. This funding would support full-tuition, room and board, and/or other support services. The high cost of postsecondary education is cited as the primary barrier youth in foster care experience when considering attending college. **For those who do pursue a college degree and decide to drop out of their programs, nearly 50% of them do so because they cannot afford to continue.**

We know that many youth who experience foster care possess the academic ability and interest to pursue higher education, but face barriers to reaching that goal. This allocation of State Fiscal Recovery Funds would reduce the burden of tuition and nonacademic barriers that prevent youth in foster care from achieving their educational goals. The value of obtaining a college degree has a lifelong impact. It is well documented that there are not only professional and personal advantages to achieving a postsecondary degree, but it is directly associated with financial stability and independence.

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 prevent many youth who have experienced foster care from benefitting from the economic advancement opportunities and financial security they would have access to if they obtained a postsecondary degree. This poses both an individual and societal cost.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is in strong support of the section of this amendment that would allocate State Fiscal Recovery Funds to support the postsecondary educational attainment of current and former foster youth, and we urge passage.