

The Honorable Marvin Abney, Chair  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Governor's Budget Amendment 12  
and  
H7905- Tuition Waiver Pilot Program  
for Children in Foster Care**

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit this letter of support for the establishment of a tuition waiver pilot program at Rhode Island College. I am also in support of the Governor's budget amendment to direct funds to this program. I am grateful to the Governor, Representative Casimiro, President Warner, Commissioner Gilkey, and all their teams for working together to research, plan and support the development of this critical program for former foster youth. This pilot program will provide a cohort of approximately 10 or more former foster youth the ability to experience their dream of higher education without the worry of housing, food insecurity, tuition, fees and where to go during holidays and summer break. This pilot program could be a game changer for RI foster youth.

Adoption Rhode Island is a private non-profit organization dedicated to safety, belonging and permanency for adopted and foster children, vulnerable youth, and families through compassionate services, advocacy, and education. We have advocated for the educational needs of foster youth for decades. We also provide educational support to foster youth as part of our DCYF funded Teen Focus program. Because only approximately 50% of RI foster youth graduate high school on time, and they are the population that has some of the highest absenteeism and suspension rates, we focus on helping young people to finish high school and consider higher education options. Our program has excellent statistics. But we must do more to help more foster youth achieve the education they need to eliminate the significant wage gap they experience compared to non-foster youth.

On April 3, 2024, The Rhode Island Longitudinal Data System Center published a report, "Higher Education Outcomes of Youth Involved with Foster Care". This report reviewed a cohort of 3,562 individuals who were in foster care in 2000 or later and were born from 1993-1997. The researchers looked at demographics, enrollment patterns, persistence rates, attainment of certificates or degrees, and the employment landscape for those who did and did not enroll in post-secondary education. Here are the highlights from the report:

- Approximately 63% of the cohort identified as White, 19% identified as Black, unknown 10%, approximately 4% identified as two or more races, 2% identified as Asian, and 1% identified as American Indian.
- For every year under review, there were more students who identified as male than female. In fact, approximately 59% of the students were male.
- Of the 3,562 individuals in the cohort, 842 (24%) appeared in the RILDS' postsecondary data by age 26.

- Eighty percent (80%) of the 842 individuals who appeared in the post -secondary data attended a Rhode Island public school.
- Of the 842 individuals who enrolled in post- secondary education, only 43% persisted to their second year.
- Between 2000-present, only 169 individuals appear in the RILDS data as having received a 2- or 4-year degree or certificate. This is less than 5 % of the total cohort.
- Comparing wages and industries of those who enrolled in post -secondary vs those who did not enroll but were found in the RILDS data, they found a significant difference. For those that do not attend post-secondary education, their median annual wages do not reach Rhode Island's minimum wage by the time individuals turn 26. For those who do graduate from post-secondary, their median annual wages exceed RI minimum wage one year after graduation and exceed Rhode island's living wage four years following graduation.

Based on the above data, stakeholders are encouraged to implement new strategies to pave the way for success in both academic and professional realms for youth involved in the foster care system. Creating a pilot program at Rhode Island College is a new strategy that can help build more successful futures for Rhode Island foster youth and contribute to our economy.

The pilot program will provide 10 or more former foster youth with the opportunity to have year- round housing, food, and tuition. Also, a Coordinator will be hired to oversee the program and collect outcome data.

As far as the total cost of the program, including year -round room and board and a coordinator, it is estimated by RIC to cost approximately \$45,000 per student per year. Each student should be able to access the maximum federal FAFSA funds as well as qualify for additional support from several programs administered at DCYF for foster youth. I am unclear the total estimated amount that would not be covered by FAFSA and DCYF. I defer to the RIC Presidents office and the Governor's office to calculate the estimated total uncovered cost per year for 5 years for a cohort of no less than 10 student each year. I am requesting that you support the budget amendment as well as FY25 allocation to launch this program in September, 2024.

I am so very excited about this project. I am happy to answer any questions and provide additional information. Please do not hesitate to reach out via cell at 401-524-3456 or email, [dallen@adoptionri.org](mailto:dallen@adoptionri.org). Thank you for your support.



Respectfully submitted,  
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CEO and Executive Director