



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

May 1, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Abney and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 6139 which would make students in workforce-ready certificate programs at the Community College of Rhode Island eligible to receive the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship.

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. When concerns about a specific out-of-home placement are brought to the attention of the OCA, our staff determine the type of advocacy that may be needed and take appropriate steps to protect the child's safety and overall well-being.

Nationally, children and youth involved in the child welfare system can experience instability in living and school environments. Students in foster care are at a higher risk than their peers of low academic achievement, grade retention, and lower graduation rates. According to the 2024 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, the four-year high school graduation rate for students in foster care was 51% compared to 84% of all students. Our most vulnerable students deserve the educational supports needed to set them up for long-term success.

Educational achievement is a powerful counterweight to the trauma, separation, abuse, neglect, and instability experienced by children and youth involved in the child welfare system. As such, it is important we provide ample opportunity for young people to access higher education, workforce development, scholarships, and postsecondary opportunities to prepare them for adulthood. Accessing tuition and wraparound postsecondary supports through the expansion of programs eligible to utilize the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship will help young adults stay on track with their educational goals, leading to higher paying jobs and independence.

The OCA supports House Bill 6139 to ensure our youth have every educational opportunity to support their academic and workforce achievements. We thank you for your continued support of children and families involved with the child welfare system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.
Child Advocate