



May 16, 2025

Re: House Bill 5077

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Foster Forward, I write in strong support of H5077, as this bill affords a critical step forward in protecting the financial futures of youth in foster care. This legislation addresses a longstanding and deeply concerning practice of using federal benefits intended for foster youth to offset the cost of their care, rather than conserving these funds for the youth's direct benefit.

Across the country, children have been unknowingly deprived of their Social Security, SSI, and other benefits, as highlighted in a recent *CBS News* investigation. H5077 responds with bold, compassionate reform: requiring transparency, benefit conservation, financial literacy training, and youth-informed decision-making.

We are especially grateful to the bill's sponsors: Representatives Casimiro, Noret, Chippendale, Roberts, Serpa, Tanzi, Cruz, Morales, Place, and Read, with heartfelt appreciation to Representative Julie Casimiro for her steadfast leadership and partnership with youth who have experienced foster care. We also applaud Jim Casey Young Fellow Sylvia Parrott and Child Advocate Katelyn Medeiros, whose advocacy brought this issue to light and propelled it into legislation.

Foster Forward stands ready to support implementation of H5077 and welcomes opportunities to partner with the SPEAK Youth Advocacy Board to offer our Jim Casey Opportunity Passport™ Program (known locally as ASPIRE) to eligible youth ages 14–26. Through ASPIRE, youth receive financial literacy training and \$1 for \$1 savings matches up to \$1,000 per year toward durable asset purchases.

We thank the House Finance Committee for your consideration and urge you to take action to correct this injustice. Rhode Island would be joining a growing number of states that are proactively passing legislation to close this loophole. Your leadership will create a pathway to financial security and brighter futures for foster youth who need it most.

Sincerely,

Lisa Guillette
Executive Director