



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

Re: H7051
Application and Distribution
Foster Youth Social Security Benefits

May 12, 2026

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the Committee:

I am writing this letter in support of House bill 7051 which will require the Department of Children, Youth and Families to establish segregated savings accounts for foster children receiving social security benefits, supplemental security income, veterans benefits or railroad retirement benefits, which payments would be exempt from asset limits to manage the accounts and keep children eligible for future benefits. Given the abundance of evidence of how challenging it is for foster youth when they exit the foster care system, Rhode Island should stop justifying the practice of taking federal benefits intended for children away from the children.

Adoption Rhode Island has worked with thousands of children and youth with foster care experience over the years. We believe that foster youth should **benefit** from **their** benefits. Foster youth have no obligation to pay for their own care. Child protection agencies do. Maximizing a mix of federal resources to fund our child protection system is critical to building and supporting a strong system. Claiming children's benefits should not be part of the mix of funding sources.

Disabled foster youth and those who have lost a parent constitute some of our nation's most vulnerable children. Some foster children are eligible for or receiving Social Security disability, survivor, or other benefits, which can amount to over \$900 per month. Federal law requires these benefits be used in the child's best interest for unmet needs. For this subset of foster youth who face tremendous obstacles when they leave care, these assets can serve as a lifeline to cover housing, food, health care, and transportation. Unfortunately, many foster youth beneficiaries will never receive their money, or even know that the state has applied for their benefits.

This bill will direct DCYF to assess all children in the temporary custody or guardianship of DCYF to determine whether they are eligible for benefits. If eligible, the Department will identify a representative payee in accordance with the specific requirements outlined in the legislation. The Department will appropriately monitor any federal asset or resource limits for the benefits and ensure that the youth's best interest is served by using or conserving the benefits in a way that avoids violating any federal asset or resource limits that would negatively impact them. The bill also requires annual data reporting to the General Assembly, including number of youth, amount of benefits, accounting of disbursements and more.

Youth who age out of foster care frequently face severe challenges including a significant risk of homelessness. Many struggle with obtaining employment, earning a degree, poor mental health, lack of credit and more. These young people often have few, if any family support to provide them with a safety net.

By supporting this legislation, youth eligible for benefits could use them to help with housing, education, and other daily needs as they transition into adulthood. This could greatly impact their ability to remain housed and attend school. In Rhode Island, approximately 1.2 million dollars of benefits are claimed and retained by the state. That is a small portion of the DCYF budget but could be a life changer for foster youth.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darlene Allen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Darlene Allen, MS
CEO and Executive Director
Adoption Rhode Island
290 West Exchange St
Providence, RI 02903
dallen@adoptionri.org