

House Finance Committee
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
Room 211
May 14, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of H 7051 — Department of Children, Youth and Families

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee. My name is Heather Croteau.

I am submitting testimony in my capacity as Committee on Political Education Secretary for SEIU Local 580, representing more than 850 public sector employees across nine Rhode Island state agencies, including staff at the Department of Children, Youth & Families who work directly with youth and families involved in the child welfare system.

SEIU Local 580 supports H 7051.

Youth involved with the child welfare system often face significant barriers as they transition into adulthood, including housing instability, limited financial resources, interrupted educational experiences, and lack of long-term family support systems. For many youth in care, access to federal benefits such as Supplemental Security Income, Social Security survivor benefits, or veterans' benefits, may represent one of the only financial foundations available to support long-term stability.

H 7051 establishes important expectations regarding the identification, application, conservation, and appropriate management of these benefits on behalf of eligible youth in care.

The bill also creates stronger transparency and accountability measures by requiring notification, documentation, financial reporting, and planning related to the use and conservation of benefits for youth receiving services through DCYF.

Importantly, the legislation recognizes that these benefits are not simply administrative funds. These are resources intended to support the long-term wellbeing and future stability of vulnerable youth.

The bill further emphasizes financial literacy, transition planning, and the preservation of benefits for eligible youth as they approach adulthood. Those components are particularly important for youth preparing to transition out of care, many of whom face significant economic and systemic challenges as they enter adulthood without traditional family support structures.

As individuals who work within public systems every day, our members understand the importance of creating processes that promote accountability, transparency, and better

long-term outcomes for youth and families. H 7051 represents a meaningful effort to strengthen protections and planning for youth involved in Rhode Island's child welfare system.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 580 respectfully urges the committee to support H 7051.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Heather Croteau

COPE Secretary

SEIU Local 580