

May 14, 2026

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

RE: Support for H7051 – Federal Benefits for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of the 44 child-centered organizations that comprise the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF), we respectfully submit this letter in support of H7051, legislation to ensure that states prioritize conserving federal benefits for which children and youth in foster care are eligible.

We thank Rep. Casimiro and the bill sponsors for advancing this important proposal, which addresses a longstanding and increasingly urgent gap in how we support children in state care.

H7051 recognizes that federal benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security survivors' benefits, are intended for the direct benefit of the child — not as a revenue source to offset the cost of services. Federal guidance has increasingly encouraged states to prioritize conserving these funds for youth, including through the use of ABLE accounts and similar financial tools that allow assets to be protected and carried into adulthood.

Too often, when children in foster care receive federal benefits, those funds are used to reimburse the state for the cost of care rather than being set aside for the child's future. As a result, youth who have experienced significant instability may exit care without the financial resources that were intended to support them.

H7051 takes a more child-centered approach by establishing clear expectations that benefits be identified, accessed, and, critically, preserved for the child, including through mechanisms such as ABLE accounts where appropriate. This approach aligns Rhode Island with emerging federal guidance and best practices focused on improving long-term outcomes for youth in care.

The legislation establishes structured responsibilities for the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), including:

- Timely eligibility screening and application for federal benefits
- Appeals of denied applications when appropriate
- Appropriate assignment and oversight of representative payees or fiduciaries
- Conservation of benefits in ways that prioritize the child's long-term financial stability, including use of ABLE accounts

- Financial literacy supports to prepare youth for adulthood
- Transparency and reporting to ensure accountability

Importantly, this bill does not create new benefits or expand eligibility. It ensures that children who are already entitled under federal law are identified, connected to those resources, and able to retain their value over time.

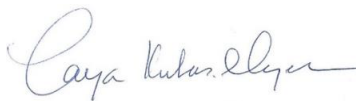
We also want to emphasize that this is a growing issue nationwide. States are increasingly re-examining the practice of using children's federal benefits to offset system costs and are instead moving toward models that preserve those resources for youth. This reflects a broader understanding that these funds can play a critical role in supporting successful transitions to adulthood, including securing housing, education, and other essential needs.

H7051 represents a thoughtful and necessary step toward aligning Rhode Island's policies with this direction and ensuring that children in care are treated with the full measure of fiscal responsibility and care they deserve.

RICCF strongly supports this legislation and believes it will strengthen the system of care by improving coordination, accountability, and long-term outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood.

We respectfully urge the Committee to give H7051 favorable consideration. Thank you for your leadership and your continued commitment to Rhode Island's children and families.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas Meyer  
Executive Director  
RI Coalition for Children and Families