

Re: Support of H 7051
May 14, 2026

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

I am writing in strong support of H 7051, which would allow qualified children with disabilities in foster care to receive and keep their Social Security benefits rather than having those benefits diverted to reimburse the state for services. While I understand the reality of the budget, these benefits are critically important to the futures of the most marginalized young citizens of our state. Receiving their Social Security benefits could prove lifesaving and life sustaining.

I write from multiple perspectives: as a former foster parent, the adoptive parent of two children from state care, as a social worker who worked directly with foster youth, and as a professor of social work at Rhode Island College. Through both my professional and personal experience, I have seen firsthand how vulnerable children in foster care are, particularly those with disabilities.

These young people already face enormous challenges due to trauma, instability, loss, family separation, and disability. As they transition out of foster care, they are often abruptly expected to function as independent adults without the family, financial, educational, and emotional supports that many of their peers rely upon well into adulthood.

The outcomes for youth aging out of foster care are deeply concerning. Former foster youth are statistically overrepresented in nearly every category of poor outcomes — including mental illness, substance use disorders, housing, unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and educational disruption. Disabled foster youth face even greater barriers and risks.

Social Security benefits are often the only financial resource available to youth to help them establish stability as young adults. These funds could help young people secure housing, transportation, education, medical care, and other necessities during their difficult transition period. Instead, our state is using these benefits, money intended for disabled children, to offset the cost of services the state is obligated to provide. This is unconscionable.

We do not ask other abused and neglected children to fund their own care; children with disabilities should not be treated differently. These benefits are intended to support their well-being, independence, and future, not to serve as a reimbursement mechanism for the state budget.

Passing H 7051 is an important step toward treating disabled youth in foster care with the dignity, fairness, and compassion they deserve. It would help provide these young people with a critical financial foundation as they enter adulthood and have to navigate a system that too often leaves them behind.

I respectfully urge you to support H 7051.

Sincerely,

Wendy Becker, PhD, LICSW