



# Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

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## **HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

June 2, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Abney and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 8603 which would exempt young people in foster or adoptive homes from the fee associated with driver education classes at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI).

My name is Katelyn Medeiros, and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight agency to the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF). As the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

Transportation can be a significant barrier to youth and young adults involved in the child welfare system. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative reported that youth involved in the foster care system who had a driver's license were 1.6 times more likely than their peers to attend school and twice as likely to work. Further, nearly two-thirds of youth in foster care surveyed as part of an outreach campaign by Think of Us requested assistance with at least one type of driving-related need.

Throughout the country, various states including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, have implemented programming and financial support to remove barriers to driver's education, license fees, insurance costs, and behind-the-wheel training. Massachusetts offers programming that provides financial reimbursement for driver's education, insurance costs, and testing fees for youth in foster care.

For youth in foster care, the expense of driver education courses can be a major obstacle to overcome, particularly for those already facing financial hardship. Waiving the fee for youth in care will enable easier access to the education needed to be informed drivers. Additionally, positive outcomes associated with obtaining a driver's license include achievement of an important normalcy milestone, increased independence, increased job opportunities that require a valid driver's license, and higher

rates of employment. Young people in the care of the state should be able to access the same important milestones as their peers who are not in care.

The Office of the Child Advocate urges passage of House Bill 8603 to support our young people in accessing driver education classes at CCRI. We thank you for your continued support of children and families involved with the child welfare system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,



Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.  
Child Advocate