



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq. - Child Advocate

childadvocate.ri.gov

35 Howard Avenue, 3rd Fl. - Cranston, RI 02920

tel: 401.462.4300

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

March 4, 2025

Thank you, Chair Craven and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 5672 which would establish the rights of adoptive/foster children or those in guardianship, to have post-separation visitation with their sibling(s).

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 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. When concerns about a specific out-of-home placement are brought to the attention of the OCA, our staff determine the type of advocacy that may be needed and take appropriate steps to protect the child's safety and overall well-being.

Children who are involved with the child welfare system deserve to have consistent and ongoing connections with their biological family whenever safe, appropriate and in the child's best interest. In cases where siblings are involved in the system, and one is adopted, it is important to continue fostering connections when in the best interest of all siblings. The OCA is supportive of centering youth voice and providing a tangible mechanism for ensuring siblings remain in contact following adoption.

Of the over 400,000 children in the foster care system in the United States, approximately 66% have a sibling in care. As a system, we must ensure that we are already identifying ways to foster strong relationships between siblings throughout their time in care. Therefore, these relationships are already established and can naturally continue once a child achieves permanency. Promoting policy and practice that will formalize established connections between siblings will support a lasting connection to their family of origin, even after DCYF involvement has ceased. In some instances, maintaining sibling relationships may be a youth's only connection to their biological family.

The [Sibling Bill of Rights](#) was adopted by DCYF following guidance from the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors to further promote the delivery of care and services to youth in foster care. Among the rights outlined in the Sibling Bill of Rights, it states "...every foster child shall be supported in his or her efforts to maintain relationships with siblings who are not in care or have been adopted or guardianshiped. The Department shall facilitate such contact as appropriate." House Bill 5672 seeks to formalize best practice and promote lifelong relationships between siblings.



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq. - Child Advocate

childadvocate.ri.gov

35 Howard Avenue, 3rd Fl. - Cranston, RI 02920

tel: 401.462.4300

While the OCA is supportive of this bill, the OCA recommends further discussion around the legal process outlined. The OCA stands ready to work with all involved. 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