

April 1, 2025

RE: In Support of H5260, H5345, H5347 - Acts Relating To Delinquent And Dependent Children -- Proceedings In Family Court and Relating to State Government

Chairman Craven, Vice Chairs Hagan and Knight, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

The Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) is comprised of forty-four member organizations who join together to advocate for child wellbeing and family safety and stability. Our members employ several thousand staff and serve thousands more children and families in every community in our state.

RICCF was an active partner in the call for and passage of the Voluntary Extension program. The intent of the initiative was and is “to support young people in becoming self-sufficient, independent, and thriving adults. The program is youth-driven where the young adult, with the assistance of a social worker, works on setting their own goals for housing, education, employment, emotional support systems, and future success. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) provides financial assistance for housing as well as money to help with the youth's personal needs throughout their participation in this program.”ⁱ

Regarding H5260 and H5347: Extension of care, as conceived, was hoped to include all of the children served by DCYF. The exclusion of children in guardianship and those who have been at the training school is an unfortunate limitation for these young people who are at high risk to have the worst outcomes in a variety of life domains. According to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, “Many of these young people are ill-prepared for independent living and face formidable challenges during their transition to adulthood. On average, young people who age out of foster care fare worse than their peers across a wide range of life domains. They are less likely to enroll in or graduate from college, less likely to be employed or earn a living wage, more likely to experience homelessness or housing instability, more likely to become involved with the criminal/legal system, and more likely to be financially insecure. Young people who age out of foster care also experience mental and behavioral health problems at higher rates than their peers. Despite these challenges, young people who age out of foster care often demonstrate remarkable resilience and many achieve positive outcomes.”ⁱⁱ Making VEC available to eligible youth from the training school (current census is 35 youth) and those transitioning to guardianship (180-190 per year) would cement our investments in these youth and promote their success.

Regarding H5345, the best practice for foster youth is continued support until 26 years of age and there is precedence for the extension to 26 in federal law. The John H. Chafee Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood program ("Chafee program"), is authorized under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) provides funding for eligible

youth to attend institutions of higher education. Youth can receive up to \$5,000 annually for up to five years (consecutive or nonconsecutive) until they reach age 26...Further, beginning on January 1, 2014, eligible young people who were in foster care at age 18 are covered under a mandatory Medicaid pathway until age 26. ⁱⁱⁱ These policy decisions are based in the clear understanding that youth require financial, education, and training supports beyond 21- increasing VEC eligibility to 26 would align to help ensure that youth succeed.

We recognize the current fiscal challenges but congratulate lead sponsor Representative Casimiro for bringing forward these critical bills to strengthen the VEC system and move youth to healthy and safe adulthood.

We urge your support of H560, H5347, and H5345.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tanja Kubas-Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tanja" being more prominent.

Tanja Kubas-Meyer
Executive Director

ⁱ Voluntary Extension of Care brochure from the RI Department of Children, Youth, and Families.
https://dcyf.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur416/files/2023-02/vec-brochure-updates-january2023_final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Tuyishime, P., Dworsky, A., & Chor, B. (2025). Advancing opportunities for young people in extended foster care: The role of independent living programs and supervised independent living placements. Chapin Hall.

ⁱⁱⁱ Youth Transitioning from Foster Care: Background and Federal Programs. (2025, April 1). <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL34499>