



**CHILDREN'S
JUSTICE
CAMPAIGN**

AN INITIATIVE OF ENOUGH ABUSE

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 8093

House Committee on Judiciary

March 12, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Submitted by: Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and esteemed members of the Committee:

The Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse submits this testimony in strong support of H8093, which would expand the definition of “educational program” under Rhode Island’s child abuse and neglect reporting statute and strengthen reporting requirements for abuse occurring in educational programs and religious organizations. This legislation addresses critical gaps in Rhode Island’s child protection framework and will help ensure that no institution serving children operates outside the reach of mandatory reporting obligations.

I. Expanding the Definition of “Educational Program” Closes a Critical Gap

H 8093 amends R.I. Gen. Laws § 40-11-2 to expand the definition of “educational program” to include charter schools, parochial schools, home-schooling programs, after-school programs, camps, youth groups, scouting organizations, tutoring programs, and “any other program that provides extracurricular, educational, athletic, artistic, behavioral, developmental, religious or other enrichment activities to children.”ⁱ This expansion is essential because child sexual abuse does not respect institutional categories. Predators seek access to children wherever that access is available, and children participate in an increasingly diverse array of programs that fall outside the traditional definition of a “school.”ⁱⁱ

The United States Department of Education has found that schools are the institutional setting where children most frequently experience sexual abuse, with more than **4.5 million students** — approximately ten percent of school-aged children— subjected to sexual misconduct by a school employee between kindergarten and twelfth grade.ⁱⁱⁱ But the risk is not confined to traditional public and private schools. After-school programs, camps, scouting organizations, tutoring programs, and religious education programs all involve the same risk factors: adult authority over children, unsupervised access, institutional cultures that prioritize reputation over accountability, and children who are developmentally unable to protect themselves.^{iv}



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The inclusion of religious organizations in the expanded definition is particularly significant. The national reckoning with institutional child sexual abuse has revealed that religious organizations—across denominations—have been among the most persistent sites of abuse and the most resistant to accountability. Attorney General investigations and grand jury reports in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Illinois, and other states have documented systematic patterns of abuse and concealment within religious institutions spanning decades.^v Ensuring that religious organizations are subject to the same reporting obligations as secular educational programs is a matter of basic child safety.

II. Strengthening the Reporting Chain Protects Rhode Island's Children

H 8093 also strengthens the reporting chain by amending R.I. Gen. Laws § 40-11-3.3 to require that reports of abuse in educational programs and religious organizations be forwarded not only to DCYF and law enforcement, but also to the child advocacy center and the department of the Attorney General.^{vi} This multi-agency notification ensures that no single institution controls the flow of information about suspected abuse—a critical safeguard against the institutional self-protection that has historically allowed abuse to be concealed.^{vii}

The bill's requirement that reports include “the name, title, and contact information for every employee, agent, contractor, or volunteer of the educational program or religious organization who is believed to have direct knowledge of the allegation” is an important transparency measure.^{viii} In case after case, institutional abuse has persisted because information was siloed—individual employees knew fragments of the truth, but no single entity had the full picture.^{ix} Requiring identification of all individuals with direct knowledge ensures that investigators can reconstruct the complete picture of what was known and when.

III. These Reforms Are Consistent with National Best Practices

Rhode Island's expansion of reporting requirements is consistent with the approach taken by states that have led the nation in child protection reform. The federal Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 expanded mandatory reporting obligations for adults who interact with minor athletes.^x Multiple states have expanded their definitions of covered institutions to include after-school programs, camps, and youth-serving organizations.^{xi} The National Children's Alliance, which accredits Children's Advocacy Centers nationwide, including in Rhode Island, has emphasized the importance of multi-disciplinary responses to child abuse allegations that involve law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, and advocacy centers working in coordination.^{xii}

H 8093 aligns Rhode Island's framework with these best practices by ensuring that the reporting net is cast broadly enough to cover the full range of settings in which children interact with adults



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in positions of trust, and that the institutional response involves all of the agencies necessary to protect the child and hold the offender accountable.

IV. Prevention Begins with Reporting

At its core, H 8093 is prevention legislation. Every mandatory reporting statute rests on a simple premise: institutions that serve children must be accountable for what happens to children in their care.^{xiii} When reporting obligations are comprehensive, institutions are incentivized to implement background checks, training, supervision protocols, and codes of conduct that prevent abuse before it occurs. When reporting obligations contain gaps—when certain types of programs or organizations are exempt or overlooked—those gaps become the spaces where abuse flourishes.^{xiv}

By expanding the definition of “educational program” and strengthening the reporting chain, H 8093 ensures that Rhode Island’s child protection framework keeps pace with the diverse array of settings in which children learn, grow, and are vulnerable. We urge the Committee to report H 8093 favorably.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions regarding this legislation or if we can be of assistance in any other way.

Respectfully submitted,

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ⁱ H 8093, § 1 (amending R.I. Gen. Laws § 40-11-2(6)).

ⁱⁱ See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fast Facts: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse (2022) (noting that perpetrators are overwhelmingly known to their victims and often hold positions of authority or trust).

ⁱⁱⁱ Carolyn A. Shakeshaft, Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature 17, 24 (U.S. Dep’t of Educ. 2004).

^{iv} See Jennifer J. Freyd, Institutional Betrayal and Institutional Courage, 20 Psych. Trauma 1, 2–4 (2018) (describing how institutional dynamics compound the harm of abuse and suppress disclosure).

^v See Md. Att’y Gen., Report of the Independent Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse in the Archdiocese of Baltimore (Apr. 2023); 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury, Report I (Pa. 2018) (documenting abuse by more



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than 300 priests across six dioceses over seventy years); Ill. Att’y Gen., Report on the Investigation of Catholic Dioceses in Illinois (2023).

^{vi} H 8093, § 1 (amending R.I. Gen. Laws § 40-11-3.3(c)).

^{vii} See U.S. Gov’t Accountability Off., GAO-10-867, K-12 Education: Selected Cases of Public and Private Schools That Hired or Retained Individuals with Histories of Sexual Misconduct 3, 7 (2010) (documenting how information about abusive educators was siloed within individual schools and districts).

^{viii} H 8093, § 1 (amending R.I. Gen. Laws § 40-11-3.3(a)).

^{ix} See Grant BJ, Wilkerson S & Henschel M, Passing the Trash: Absence of State Laws Allows for Continued Sexual Abuse of K-12 Students by School Employees, 28(1) J. Child Sex Abuse 84 (2019) (documenting how educators accused of misconduct are transferred between schools without disclosure).

^x Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-126, 132 Stat. 318 (2018) (codified in scattered sections of 36 U.S.C.).

^{xi} See, e.g., 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. § 6303 (West 2024) (defining “child-care services” broadly to include programs providing care, supervision, or guidance to children); N.Y. Soc. Servs. Law § 413 (McKinney 2024) (mandated reporter statute covering extensive list of professionals and institutional personnel).

^{xii} See National Children’s Alliance, Standards for Accredited Members 5–8 (2023) (setting forth multi-disciplinary team investigation standards for accredited Children’s Advocacy Centers).

^{xiii} See *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 582 U.S. 98, 107 (2017) (recognizing the state’s compelling interest in protecting children from sexual abuse).

^{xiv} See Shakeshaft, *supra* note 4, at 32–36 (documenting how gaps in institutional accountability enabled the practice of “passing the trash”).