



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
Department of Children, Youth and Families
Director's Office
101 Friendship St.
Providence, RI 02903

March 24, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee, Chairwoman
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: 2026 H-7546 – Relating to Criminal Procedure – Arrest

Dear Chairwoman McEntee:

I am writing on behalf of the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF or “the department”) to express concerns with H 7546, which will be heard in your committee.

This bill would expand the definition of “peace officers” to include Juvenile Program Workers (JPWs) and shift coordinators from the Rhode Island Training School (RITS). For context, JPWs and shift coordinators are front-line staff at the RITS.

The department’s concern is two-fold:

1. This bill unlawfully expands the duties and powers of JPWs and shift coordinators in violation of the collective bargaining agreement between them and the State.

Pursuant to § 42-72-5¹, among others, DCYF handles juvenile justice programming in the State of Rhode Island. Further, under § 42-72-17², youth services at the Department of Corrections (DOC) were expressly transferred out of DOC and into DCYF. This transfer shows that the State considers juvenile justice programming, including its staff, to be part of the child welfare system, not Corrections.

Any additional details concerning the duties or responsibilities for JPWs or shift coordinators that are not in statute are contained in the job specifications issued by the Rhode Island Department of Administration (DOA). However, duties and responsibilities are not included in the DOA job specifications unless the employees’ union and the State have engaged in collective bargaining and agreed to said specifications.

Expanding the definition of “peace officers” to include these juvenile justice employees at DCYF would add duties and responsibilities outside the scope of what has been collectively bargained for. For example, if a JPW were now a “peace officer,” they would be allowed to perform several actions the State has not agreed to, including, but not limited to:

- Detaining suspects³
- Making arrests⁴
- Using life-threatening force⁵

¹ § 42-72-5(18) and (27). Powers and scope of duties.

² § 42-72-17. Transfer of functions from department of corrections.

³ § 12-7-1. Temporary detention of suspects.

⁴ § 12-7-3. Arrest without warrant for misdemeanor or petty misdemeanor.

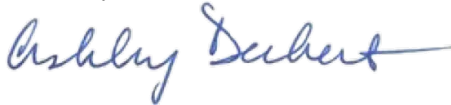
⁵ § 12-7-9. Conditions justifying force dangerous to life.

2. This bill circumvents the public hearing process required by the Rhode Island Department of Administration (DOA).

In order to change the duties or scope of work of any classification of state employee, there must be a public hearing conducted by DOA before such changes can be implemented. If this bill passes, it will add to the scope of work for JPWs and shift coordinators without going through the public hearing process required by DOA.

Thank you for allowing the department to submit testimony outlining its concerns regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley Deckert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ashley Deckert, MSW, MA
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy