



April 16, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In Support of H7037 – An Act Relating to Delinquent and Dependent Children – Proceedings in Family Court

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF), we respectfully submit this testimony in support of H7037.

RICCF is composed of 44 member organizations that provide and advocate for services supporting children and families across Rhode Island, including behavioral health, juvenile justice, child welfare, education, and healthcare. Our members work closely with children who come into contact with law enforcement and the family court system, and we are committed to policies that promote developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed responses.

H7037 represents an important step toward ensuring that Rhode Island's youngest children are treated in a manner consistent with their age, development, and vulnerability. Limiting the use of handcuffs for children twelve and under, except in circumstances where there is a clear safety risk, recognizes that young children require a fundamentally different approach than older youth or adults. For many children, early interactions with law enforcement can be confusing and frightening; unnecessarily restrictive practices can exacerbate trauma and have lasting negative impacts.

The bill also appropriately limits the arrest and delinquency adjudication of children twelve and under to only the most serious offenses. This aligns with research and best practices indicating that formal system involvement at such a young age can increase the likelihood of deeper and more prolonged involvement in the juvenile justice system. Instead, younger children are best served through community-based, family-centered interventions that address underlying needs and support healthy development.

Our members see firsthand that many young children who come into contact with law enforcement have experienced significant adversity, including trauma, behavioral health challenges, and instability. Responses that prioritize safety while minimizing harm are critical to ensuring better outcomes for these children and their families.

H7037 strikes an appropriate balance by preserving law enforcement's ability to respond to genuine safety concerns while establishing clear, developmentally appropriate guardrails for how young children are treated. We respectfully urge your support for H7037.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tanja Kubas Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tanja Kubas Meyer
Executive Director
Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families