



## The RI **FREEDOM** Collective

RELATING TO DELINQUENT AND DEPENDENT CHILDREN - PROCEEDINGS IN FAMILY COURT

### **Testimony in Support of H7037**

Dear Chairperson McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

H7037 takes an essential step toward protecting Rhode Island's youngest children by prohibiting the use of handcuffs on anyone under the age of 12, except in the rarest and most immediate safety emergencies.

Children this young lack the developmental capacity to regulate fear or fully understand what is happening around them, and placing them in handcuffs can inflict lasting trauma that far outweighs any perceived benefit. Research consistently shows that early exposure to force undermines a child's emotional development and erodes trust in adults and law enforcement. At the same time, handcuffing young children offers little to no improvement in officer safety, as verbal de-escalation is almost always sufficient.

By establishing a bright-line rule, H7037 protects children, reduces liability for officers and departments, and ensures that Rhode Island responds to childhood behavior with care, not criminalization.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support this bill and move it to the floor for a vote.

Sincerely,

Rhode Island Freedom Collective