

April 16, 2026

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

RE: Support H7195 – Delinquent and Dependent Children – Proceedings in Family Court

Dear Chair McEntee, and Members of the Committee:

The Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) represents a network of 44 organizations that provide and advocate for services supporting children and families across behavioral health, education, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems.

H5719 is a critical step toward safeguarding the rights of juveniles. Young people are uniquely vulnerable in interrogation settings and often lack the developmental capacity to fully understand their rights or the consequences of their statements. Requiring the presence of a parent, guardian, DCYF representative, or attorney ensures that juveniles have appropriate support and protection during questioning and helps prevent coercion, confusion, or unintended self-incrimination.

Research shows that adolescents are more susceptible to pressure from authority figures and more likely to comply in high-stress situations, including police interrogations.¹ Without appropriate support, this can lead to unreliable statements, including false confessions. Additionally, the experience of interrogation itself can be traumatic, particularly for youth who may already have experienced instability or adversity.²

This legislation aligns with the rehabilitative goals of the juvenile justice system by recognizing the importance of family involvement and appropriate legal protections. Ensuring that youth are supported during questioning promotes fairness, strengthens due process, and helps avoid outcomes that can have long-term consequences for a young person's life.

¹ Waxson, SP, Innocent Juvenile Confessions, Retrieved March, 2023 from <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7660&context=jclc>

² Del Toro, J. et al. (2019), The criminogenic and psychological effects of police stops on adolescent black and Latino boys, PNAS, 116 (17), 8261-8268, <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/17/8261>; Jackson, D.B. et al. (2020), Police stops and sleep behaviors among at-risk youth, Sleep Health, 6(4), 435-441, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32305306/>; Jackson, D.B. et al. (2019), Police Stops Among At-Risk Youth: Repercussions for Mental Health, J Adolesc Health, 65(5), 627-632, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31495640/>; Landers, A.J. et al. (2011), Police contacts and stress among African American college students, Am J Orthopsychiatry, 81(1), 72-81, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21219277/>. In addition, interrogations can cause children to feel frightened and helpless, which can lead to trauma responses. See The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, About Child Trauma, <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma>.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support H7195 and strengthen protections for children and youth in Rhode Island's legal system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tanja Kubas Meyer".

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