



## The RI FREEDOM Collective

RELATING TO DELINQUENT AND DEPENDENT CHILDREN - PROCEEDINGS IN FAMILY COURT

IN SUPPORT OF H 7195

Dear Chairperson McEntee and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Requiring the presence of a parent, legal guardian, attorney, or DCYF representative when a juvenile is questioned is essential because children simply do not have the developmental maturity to understand their rights, the consequences of speaking to police, or the pressures of an interrogation. Without a supportive adult or legal advocate, a young person is far more vulnerable to intimidation, confusion, and giving statements that are inaccurate or coerced. Ensuring that a responsible adult is present—unless the youth is truly emancipated or has deliberately misrepresented themselves as 18 or older—creates a critical safeguard that protects due process, prevents wrongful admissions, and ensures that any information obtained is genuinely voluntary and reliable. This standard recognizes the unique vulnerability of minors and reinforces a justice system that treats children with fairness, care, and accountability.

A law requiring that a parent, legal guardian, attorney, or DCYF representative be present when a juvenile is questioned is essential because it closes a dangerous gap in due-process protections for children. Juveniles are uniquely vulnerable in interrogations: they are more likely to misunderstand their rights, more likely to comply with authority even when frightened or confused, and far more likely to give false or unreliable statements. Without a responsible adult or legal advocate in the room, the power imbalance between a child and law enforcement becomes extreme, and the integrity of the investigation suffers. Passing this law ensures that any questioning is conducted fairly, that the youth's constitutional rights are protected, and that statements obtained are genuinely voluntary and trustworthy. It also provides clarity for law enforcement, consistency across cases, and a safeguard for situations where parental rights have been terminated and DCYF must step in. In short, this law strengthens justice, protects children, and promotes reliable outcomes that the courts and the public can trust.

For these reasons we respectfully urge you to move this bill to the floor for a vote.

Sincerely,

Rhode Island Freedom Collective

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