



April 14, 2026

House Judiciary Committee

Rhode Island State House Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of H7818 An Act Relating to Youth Detention and Commitment Limits

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Diana Garlington, I am an advocate and Policy Program Officer at United Way RI, and I am here in strong support of House Bill 7818. This bill recognizes something we must never lose sight of—children are still developing, still learning, and still deserving of care, even when they make mistakes. Youth who are twelve years old or younger should not be placed in detention settings except in the most serious and extreme circumstances.

Detaining young children can have lasting harm. It can increase trauma, disrupt development, and push youth further into the justice system rather than guiding them toward healing and accountability. At that age, behavior is often a reflection of unmet needs, exposure to trauma, or lack of support, not a fixed path toward criminality. H7818 creates a necessary boundary. It ensures that detention or commitment to the

training school is only used as a last resort for the most serious offenses, and only when there is no other safe option. This encourages courts and systems to prioritize community-based alternatives, mental health supports, and family-centered interventions.

In my work in violence prevention and community advocacy, I have seen how early intervention, not incarceration, is what truly changes outcomes. When we respond to children with support instead of punishment, we reduce harm, strengthen families, and build safer communities. This bill is about protecting children while still protecting public safety. It is a balanced, thoughtful approach that reflects both accountability and compassion.

I respectfully urge you to support H7818.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Diana Garlington
PVD Equity Fund Policy Program Officer