

April 16, 2026

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

RE: In Support of H7818 – 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) is a network of 44 organizations providing and advocating for services that support children and families across behavioral health, education, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems. Our members work closely with youth involved in or at risk of entering the justice system, and we are deeply concerned about the long-term impact of incarceration on young children.

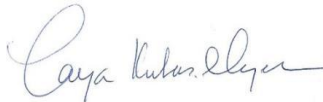
Research consistently shows that incarceration at a young age leads to worse outcomes, not better ones. Youth who are detained are more likely to reoffend, less likely to graduate from high school, and more likely to experience long-term physical and mental health challenges.¹ For younger children in particular, placement in a secure correctional setting can be destabilizing and retraumatizing, especially for those who have already experienced significant adversity.²

H7818 reflects an important shift toward developmentally appropriate responses for young children. At the same time, we recognize that there are cases involving serious charges where safe alternatives must be available. Rhode Island should continue to invest in and expand appropriate placement options and services for younger children, ensuring safety while avoiding the harmful effects of incarceration.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support H7818 as a step toward a more effective and humane approach to serving Rhode Island's youngest and most vulnerable youth.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas Meyer
Executive Director

¹ Hjalmarsson, R. (2008). Criminal Justice Involvement and High School Completion. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63, 613–630. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2007.04.003>

² Mendel, R. (n.d.). *NO PLACE FOR KIDS The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED527944.pdf>