



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

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childadvocate.ri.gov

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

April 16, 2026

Thank you, Chair McEntee and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 8099 which allows a young person between the ages of 14 and 17 without a permanent residence/in custody of the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) to get a state identification card without a signature from a parent, guardian, or foster parent as well as a certified copy of their birth certificate at no cost.

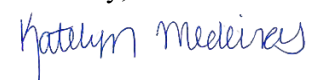
My name is Katelyn Medeiros, and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight agency to DCYF. As the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

The OCA is in full support of this bill and would like to thank Representative Newberry for addressing this important issue. The OCA previously received many calls regarding the need for this support for young people from providers, DCYF, and youth to assist in obtaining their state identification card and birth certificate. The barriers identified were primarily funding and lack of legal documentation. It is imperative that young people have access to their vital legal documents. When raising this issue to DCYF, they were very responsive and recognized the importance of legal documents being accessible to youth involved with DCYF and a work group was created to identify a solution. The partners in this work group included DCYF, the Department of Health, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Rhode Island Family Court, and the OCA. In July 2025, DCYF issued a [press release](#) announcing this collaborative initiative to support young people under the care of DCYF's Division of Youth Development in accessing essential documents.

House Bill 8099 will permanently safeguard this collaborative initiative into law, guaranteeing that young people ages 14 to 17 have a clear, reliable pathway to obtain their legal documents. These documents are essential—they provide valid identification in the community, enable youth to secure employment, obtain a driver's license, access critical benefits, and they play a pivotal role in supporting a successful transition out of the child welfare system. Too often, young people involved in the juvenile justice system face barriers that delay their growth and opportunity. Access to legal documents is critical for our justice-involved youth. These documents are more than paperwork; they are keys to education, employment, housing, and healthcare, promoting a sense of normalcy and independence. By establishing these foundational supports, this legislation positions our youth for stability and long-term success.

We thank you for your continued support of children and families involved with the child welfare, children's behavioral health, and juvenile justice systems in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katelyn Medeiros". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.

Child Advocate