



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
Department of Children, Youth and Families
Director's Office
101 Friendship St.
Providence, RI 02903

January 27, 2026

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chairman
House Committee on State Government and Elections
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: 2026 H-7237 – Permanent Joint Committee on the Department of Children, Youth and Families Oversight

Dear Chairman Shanley:

Please accept this letter from the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF or “the Department”) regarding H 7237, which will be heard in the Committee on State Government and Elections.

DCYF values legislative oversight and recognizes the important role of the General Assembly in ensuring transparency and accountability, system improvement, and positive outcomes for children and families. The Department regularly participates in Oversight hearings and remains committed to continuing that engagement.

Regarding this legislation, the Department would like to provide this Committee with the following concerns:

1. This bill creates responsibilities that overlap with the existing jurisdiction of the Committee on Oversight.

DCYF attends and fully participates in hearings when the Department receives notice from the House Committee on Oversight. Of note, DCYF has participated in Oversight hearings in each of the last two legislative sessions.¹

Further, the Committee on Oversight has a Subcommittee on Children and Families, which is chaired by the lead sponsor of this legislation. Passing this bill and establishing a new, separate committee dedicated solely to the oversight of DCYF could require the Department to attend and present the same information to two separate committees. This would be redundant in both operations and cost to the Department.

2. This bill creates responsibilities that overlap with the existing jurisdiction of other committees.

Depending on its exact nature, a bill or resolution “dealing with or affecting the department of children, youth and families”² may be assigned to any number of committees in the House of Representatives. DCYF works with bill sponsors and provides testimony – whether in person or in writing – when bills impacting the Department are heard, no matter the committee.

The language of H 7237 does not replace that process. In fact, it specifically repeats it. The House of Representatives “shall refer to the joint committee, either initially or after action by other committees, all bills and resolutions” relating to DCYF.³ This would include the Governor’s budget article relating to DCYF

¹ Tuesday, January 23, 2024; and Wednesday May 21, 2025.

² See 2026-H 7237: page 2, lines 16-17.

³ See 2026-H 7237: page 2, lines 15-16. *Emphasis added.*

funding, as well as other proposed pieces of legislation introduced during session. Further, and as you know, committee actions include hearings and votes.

In other words, a DCYF-related bill – such as the budget – could be heard and voted on in another committee, but it would still have to be referred to this new Joint Committee on DCYF Oversight anyway. If the bill was set for hearing again, it would require testimony a second time, doubling the amount of time interested parties would need to spend making sure their voice was heard on a particular matter. This is another example of how resources would be duplicated if this piece of legislation is passed.

3. Enacting this bill would require DCYF to hire additional staff.

The Department takes all legislative hearings seriously. It works diligently to research, compose, and finalize testimony – including the testimony you are reading right now – that is informative and accurate. Moreover, before any hearing, the Department will have several internal conversations aimed at presenting information that is as accessible as possible to the audience. Individuals outside of DCYF have varying degrees of familiarity with the intricacies of the child welfare system, its terms, and the innumerable acronyms, so DCYF endeavors to make its testimony as universally understandable as possible.

This work takes time for any legislative hearing, and Oversight hearings require even more. It shifts staff capacity away from Department initiatives, including the system reform efforts currently underway. Further, if Department representatives cannot fully answer a question raised in a hearing, DCYF will be permitted to provide a follow-up response. Again, this follow-up takes coordinated effort and time.

Establishing an additional oversight body that is focused solely on DCYF and duplicates the functions of existing committees would significantly increase the administrative and operational demands on the Department, necessitating additional staff.⁴

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this legislation.

Sincerely,



Ashley Deckert, MSW, MA
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections
The Honorable Julie A. Casimiro
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy

⁴ The Department estimates needing 2 additional full-time equivalent (FTE) positions but reserves the right to update this estimate if the language of this bill is amended to eliminate redundancies.