



641 Bald Hill Road
Warwick, RI 02886
401-467-9940
www.ricadv.org
ricadv@ricadv.org
24-hour Helpline:
800-494-8100

Member Agencies

Blackstone Valley
Advocacy Center
Domestic Violence
Resource Center of
South County
Elizabeth Buffum
Chace Center
Women's Resource Center

Task Force

Sisters Overcoming
Abusive Relationships

Affiliate Members

Center for Southeast Asians
Crossroads Rhode Island
Family Service of Rhode Island
McAuley Ministries –
McAuley Village
Progreso Latino
YWCA Rhode Island

To: Representative Susan Donovan, Chair of the House Health and Human Services Committee
Honorable Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee

From: Lucy Rios, Executive Director
RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: March 30, 2026, 2026

Re: **Support House Bill 7994**

On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR, our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence appreciates this opportunity to express our **support for H-7994**. This legislation would expand DCYF's powers by overseeing and administering comprehensive behavioral health services for children with serious emotional disturbances and children with developmental or functional disabilities. This bill represents a crucial step forward in creating a more integrated, comprehensive system of care that meets the unique needs of our state's children and families.

Currently, Rhode Island's behavioral health system for children remains fragmented across multiple agencies, creating unnecessary silos and barriers to access essential resources. These barriers affect those experiencing domestic violence as well. Domestic violence not only affects adults, it also has a serious negative impact on children. Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to experience continued challenges throughout their childhood and adulthood. These challenges include emotional, physical, health, and learning issues. Children that are exposed to domestic violence are often victims of physical abuse, and they are at increased risk of entering abusive relationships or committing abuse in relationships themselves.¹ For children who witness domestic violence this lifelong struggle of trying to overcome the challenges of their environment can often be a result of the lack of easy and accessible support and resources during their childhood.

When families are engaged in treatment, and children receive care in familiar, supportive environments, outcomes improve, and long-term success is far more achievable. Early intervention is essential for preventing more serious behavioral health issues in the future. This includes children who witness domestic violence. When children who witness domestic violence receive assistance and interventions, such as therapeutic intervention, they can become more resilient and even thrive. The sooner a child gets help, the better their chances are for becoming a mentally and physically healthy adult. By strengthening and improving DCYF's ability to coordinate between agencies we can help address the challenges children face when navigating the current system and help to ensure children and their families don't fall through the cracks in the system.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. **We urge you to support this legislation to establish a more unified, effective, and equitable system of care for children and families across Rhode Island.**

¹ Kids Count RI. (2024). *2024 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*. Retrieved from https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/children-witnessing-domestic-violence_2024fb.pdf