



# Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

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## **SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

May 6, 2026

Thank you, Chair Gallo and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 2524 which would establish provisions for student and teacher classroom safety and provides for the authority to remove students from classrooms and the administrative response to the same. This act would provide for student and education protection from said removal and the school district's responsibilities to the safety of the student.

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 the Department of Children, Youth & Families (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. When concerns about a specific out-of-home or education placement are brought to the attention of the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), our staff determine the type of advocacy that may be needed and take appropriate steps to protect the child's safety, overall well-being, and success.

Children are most successful in safe, stable, and permanent family and school environments. Students experiencing foster care have higher rates of school mobility than their peers, often connected to instability in out-of-home placement. High rates of school mobility cause disruptions to the student's school environment, fragmented learning, disconnections with peer and school settings, and contribute to lower academic achievement. Students with frequent school changes are more likely to experience a higher rate of disciplinary disparities in the school environment including exclusionary forms of discipline such as classroom removal, suspension, or expulsion. In comparison to their peers, students in foster care are five times more likely to be expelled than their peers due to behavioral issues which are frequently connected to trauma, placement disruptions, and instability.

Students in foster care often experience challenges outside of school that can directly impact their academic performance and achievement. Changes in out-of-home placement, trauma, behavioral health issues, and disrupted connections to people and places, often compound challenges related to typical school and classroom engagement. It is important to highlight that behaviors leading to classroom removals can often reflect the impact of these life disruptions on a student as well as indicate potential unmet disabilities or needs. Appropriately addressing the needs of students in foster care can mitigate the need for removals, allowing students to remain in the classroom and help create a more diverse and engaging educational environment. As such, school departments should continue the progress that has been made in recent years in prioritizing the development of creative, trauma-informed behavior modification interventions to effectively lessen or eliminate the need for classroom removals.

The OCA recognizes the need to ensure that all school classrooms remain safe, structured learning environments for students and teachers. Strong classrooms foster substantive academic growth when educators can focus on teaching in a space with minimal disruption. However, most school environments are dynamic, requiring students and teachers to navigate changes and adapt to occasional disruptions at any given time.

Classroom removals may be a necessary intervention if there is an immediate behavior or safety crisis. However, it is equally important to recognize the unique needs of students in foster care coupled with the need for continued investment in long-term, trauma-informed approaches that will help students engage in positive behaviors and increase learning opportunities for all students. Classroom removals alone are likely not the solution to create sustainable change in student behavior.

The OCA is ready and willing to work with the sponsors of this proposed legislation to identify strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches to support students in foster care along with their peers to ensure safe, focused, and engaged learning.

Thank you for your continued support of children and families impacted by the child welfare system 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