

May 5, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma, Chair  
Senate Committee on Finance  
State House  
Providence, RI

RE: S2841 – Support for Federal Benefits for Foster Children

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

On behalf of the 44 child-centered organizations that comprise the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF), we respectfully submit this letter in support of S2841, legislation to ensure that states prioritize conserving federal benefits for which youth children and youth in foster care are eligible.

We thank Senators Lauria and DiMario for their leadership in advancing this important proposal, which addresses a longstanding and increasingly urgent gap in how we support children in the state's purview.

S2841 recognizes that federal benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security survivors' benefits, are intended for the direct benefit of the child- not as a revenue source to offset the cost of services. Federal guidance has increasingly encouraged states to prioritize conserving these funds for youth, including through the use of ABLE accounts and similar financial tools that allow assets to be protected and carried into adulthood.

Too often, when children in foster care receive federal benefits, those funds are used to reimburse the state for the cost of care rather than being set aside for the child's future. As a result, youth who have experienced significant instability may exit care without the financial resources that were intended to support them.

S2841 takes a more child-centered approach by establishing clear expectations that benefits be identified, accessed, and, critically, preserved for the child, including through mechanisms such as ABLE accounts where appropriate. This approach aligns Rhode Island with emerging federal guidance and best practices focused on improving long-term outcomes for youth in care.

The legislation establishes structured responsibilities for the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), including:

- Timely eligibility screening and application for federal benefits
- Appeals of denied applications when appropriate
- Appropriate assignment and oversight of representative payees or fiduciaries
- Conservation of benefits in ways that prioritize the child's long-term financial stability, including use of ABLE accounts

- Financial literacy supports to prepare youth for adulthood
- Transparency and reporting to ensure accountability

Importantly, this bill does not create new benefits or expand eligibility. It ensures that children who are already entitled under federal law are identified, connected to those resources, and able to retain their value over time.

We also want to emphasize that this is a growing issue nationwide. States are increasingly re-examining the practice of using children's federal benefits to offset system costs and are instead moving toward models that preserve those resources for youth. This reflects a broader understanding that these funds can play a critical role in supporting successful transitions to adulthood, including securing housing, education, and other essential needs.

S2841 represents a thoughtful and necessary step toward aligning Rhode Island's policies with this direction and ensuring that children in care are treated with the full measure of fiscal responsibility and care they deserve.

RICCF strongly supports this legislation and believes it will strengthen the system of care by improving coordination, accountability, and long-term outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood.

We respectfully urge the Committee to give S2841 favorable consideration. Thank you for your leadership and your continued commitment to Rhode Island's children and families.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas Meyer  
Executive Director