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March 10, 2026

Senator Matthew L. LaMountain, Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island Senate

RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill S2940

Dear Chair LaMountain and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Child & Family Rhode Island to express strong support for Senate Bill S2940, which would establish a full-time statewide juvenile hearing board coordinator to support and strengthen municipal juvenile hearing boards across Rhode Island.

As an organization that works closely with young people and families involved in the juvenile justice system, we see firsthand the importance of coordinated, community-based responses that address the underlying needs of youth while promoting accountability, rehabilitation, and positive development.

Child & Family has long been a community leader in the juvenile justice space. Through our Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Functional Family Therapy–Gang (FFT-G) programs, we work with youth and families who are involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the justice system. These evidence-based programs focus on strengthening family relationships, reducing recidivism, and helping young people make healthier decisions.

Child & Family also serves as the lead organization for Rhode Island Systems for Equity (RISE): Advancing Systems Change for Youth & Public Safety, in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Through this initiative, we work with community partners, state agencies, and stakeholders to improve outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system by strengthening diversion strategies, promoting equitable access to services, and advancing community-based approaches that enhance both youth development and public safety.

We see the tremendous value of early intervention and diversion strategies that keep youth connected to their families, schools, and communities rather than

pushing them deeper into the justice system.

S2940 represents an important step toward strengthening Rhode Island's community-based juvenile justice infrastructure. By creating a dedicated statewide coordinator, the bill will help ensure consistency, training, and technical support for juvenile hearing boards across municipalities. This coordination will improve data collection, facilitate collaboration with community partners, and expand meaningful community service and restorative opportunities for youth.

Importantly, the bill also ensures that youth charged with a first-time misdemeanor offense are referred to these community-based hearing boards. This approach allows young people to take responsibility for their actions, repair harm where appropriate, and access supportive community-based services while avoiding unnecessary deeper involvement in the justice system.

Strengthening juvenile hearing boards aligns with Rhode Island's broader commitment to equitable, community-centered juvenile justice reform. Programs like FFT and FFT-G demonstrate that when families receive the right support and youth are given constructive opportunities to repair harm and change course, long-term outcomes improve for both young people and the communities in which they live.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support S2940 and continue investing in approaches that prioritize rehabilitation, accountability, and community partnership.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued commitment to Rhode Island's youth and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan C. Jacobsen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Susan Jacobsen  
President & CEO