



Testimony Re: Senate Bill 135
Senate Judiciary Committee
June 1, 2023
Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to thank Senator Kallman for sponsoring this legislation and thank Senators Euer, Mack, Lawson, Acosta, Lauria, Quezada, McKenney, and Burke for co-sponsoring. We would also like to thank Lt. Governor Matos for her championship of this bill and voice our support for Senate Bill 135. **This bill would help justice-impacted and formerly incarcerated individuals successfully reintegrate into the community by improving their access to stable housing.** It limits background checks for non-violent offenses and establishes a system for landlords to conduct individualized assessments of prospective tenants from this population.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT speaks out about the importance of housing because we know that poor quality, unaffordable, and crowded housing has a negative impact on children's physical health, development, school performance, and emotional well-being and on a family's ability to meet their child's basic needs. **When a parent has been incarcerated or otherwise involved in the justice system, this affects many aspects of a child's life, including their housing stability. A parent's criminal history (even from long ago or for a non-violent crime) can be a barrier to the family finding and retaining housing and make that family more vulnerable to homelessness.** Their applications for housing may be denied, and families already in stable, affordable housing may be at risk of losing their housing if a parent tries to rejoin the family after being released from prison.

This legislation would make sure that justice-impacted and formerly incarcerated Rhode Islanders have a fair chance for a second start. We urge you to pass the *Fair Chance in Housing Act* so landlords and housing providers will be prohibited from discriminating against applicants with non-violent criminal records and unfavorable credit histories.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in tackling the many complex issues that affect families' ability to secure safe and affordable housing and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.