



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 43 – Relating to Residence of Children for School Purposes

Senate Education Committee

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the intent of Senate Bill 43 which addresses the critical issue of transportation for students in the care of DCYF. This bill would require the state to reimburse the city or town for any costs associated with transporting children placed in foster care to an educational facility outside the regional transportation district.

The federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* was signed into law on December 10, 2015, reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act's (ESEA)* mission “to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.” *ESSA* contains key protections for students in foster care that promote school stability and success, and requires collaboration between child welfare partners and school districts.

ESSA requires that students in foster care be allowed to stay in their school of origin if in their best interest in order to preserve connections to familiar teachers, peers, educational environment, and activities and requires transportation be provided to and from their school of origin.

Student mobility is associated with lower academic performance, behavior difficulties, lower levels of school engagement, and increased risk of dropping out of high school. One-third of children in foster care will experience five or more school changes before they turn age 18, and such changes often result in lost academic progress. This bill places a very important focus on the need to determine a workable solution to ensure that students are able to remain in their school of origin, and the need to ensure that transportation is provided when necessary. Continuity in education is critical for positive student outcomes, and this issue of transportation has been a major obstacle to ensuring educational stability for students in foster care.

Thank you for working on this important issue, and we look forward to working toward a lasting solution to support educational stability for students in foster care. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

