



**Testimony Re: H-7663 Relating to Human Services – Abused and Neglected Children**  
**House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare**  
**March 16, 2016**  
**John Neubauer, Policy Analyst**

Thank you to Chairman McNamara and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify in regards to H-7663, a bill that would expand the responsibilities of DCYF and the Child Advocate’s Office in investigating, reviewing, and publically reporting on child deaths due to abuse or neglect. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports the principles of this bill and would like to offer some suggestions about how this legislation could potentially be further strengthened.

H-7663 requires DCYF to forward any reports of the death of any child that is receiving or has ever received DCYF services to the Child Advocate’s Office. The current law only requires DCYF to forward reports of institutional child abuse and neglect to the Child Advocate’s Office.

**Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Due to Child Abuse and/or Neglect, Rhode Island, 2009-2013**

YEAR	# OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS**
2009	193	26	6
2010	161	31	0
2011	159	38	2
2012	153	25	1
2013	133	34	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>12</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2009-2013. Data for 2012 and 2013 are provisional.

- According to the Department of Health, there were 12 child deaths due to child abuse and neglect between 2009 and 2013 (not all of these children were necessarily receiving services or had received services in the past from DCYF).

H-7663 also requires that the Child Advocate forward any investigation reports regarding the death of a child or institutional abuse or neglect to the Governor, Director of the Department of Health, Speaker of the House, and Senate President. While we support transparency and oversight in child deaths investigations, we recommend language be added to this bill to ensure that this reporting requirement does not violate any privacy or confidentiality laws.

H-7663 also requires that the Child Advocate convene a child fatality review board to review child deaths and complete an annual report of the reviews. We would respectfully recommend that this fatality review coordinate with the existing Child Death Review team at the Rhode Island Department of Health, which examines child deaths from all causes including child abuse and neglect. We also recommend that the Child Advocate’s review board be made up of child welfare stakeholders who have the expertise to evaluate systemic issues that may have contributed to a child’s death.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.