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Testimony Re: House Bill 8207 Foster Parents' Bill of Rights
House Health, Education & Welfare Committee
May 18, 2016
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 8207, which would expand upon the Foster Parents' Bill of Rights and establish it in the state law. (The current Foster Parents' Bill of Rights is a part of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) agency foster care regulations.)

Foster parents play a critically important role in our state's child welfare system by caring for children who have been abused or neglected. Whether they are relatives or other caring adults in the community, foster parents provide a sense of family and stability to children in crisis. Foster parents often develop deep bonds with their foster children and can have important insight into a child's case plan and permanency goals. As the children's primary caretakers, they play an important role in carrying out the tasks in a child's permanency plan.

This bill would help to ensure that foster parents are equipped to provide the best possible support for the children in their care. The legislation provides more details about the rights of foster parents than the existing foster care regulations. We think that this bill made important progress toward striking the right balance between protecting the rights of biological parents and those of foster parents so that children are well cared for and can achieve permanency. We urge the sponsors and the committee to consider some minor language modifications to make the text match a very similar bill on the Senate side, S-2611-SubA.

S-211 SubA includes some language that helps to define what is meant by the "right to exercise parental substitute authority" so that it aligns with the federal *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act* of 2014. This federal law requires states to implement a "reasonable and prudent parent standard" for decisions made by foster parents. This standard allows caregivers to make parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interest of the youth, as well as decisions about the child's participation in extracurricular, cultural, and social activities. This standard aims to promote "normalcy" for children in foster care so that they may participate in the same activities as their peers. We urge the House to adopt and pass the same language for H-8207.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting foster families and for the opportunity to provide testimony today.