



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2572
Senate Education Committee
April 13, 2016
Stephanie Geller, Senior Policy Analyst

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 Senate Bill 2572 which would require the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop regulations regarding the high school graduation requirements for youth who are in the care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families at any time after the youth's fourteenth birthday.

Children in foster care are more likely than their peers to change schools, be suspended, qualify for special education, repeat a grade, and drop out of school. Appropriate supports and services can help youth in care maximize their potential and ensure that they are prepared for higher education and work. However, in addition to supports and services, we may also need to look at system changes.

One of the common barriers to educational success for children and youth in the care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is that, if they have to change educational placements, credits and other requirements for transitioning to higher grade levels and/or graduation do not always follow them to their new school. This situation is exacerbated when a child or youth has multiple educational placement changes during the time they are involved with DCYF. Ensuring the portability of students' academic credits and work towards graduation is an important step towards improving the educational lives of youth in care. However, we must also ensure that the variability of high school graduation requirements across districts, particularly differences in performance-based graduation requirements (e.g., portfolios, senior projects, etc), do not create an unnecessary barrier to graduation for youth who are or have been in DCYF care.

The Rhode Island Department of Education is in the process of reviewing and revising the *Secondary School Regulations* and, in particular, the high school graduation requirements. We recommend that these regulations include specific language regarding the high school graduation requirements for youth who are or have been in the care of DCYF during their high school years. High school graduation requirements for youth who have been in DCYF care should be rigorous but flexible and take into account the educational instability that many of these youth experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.