



Senate Finance Committee and Senate Health and Human Services Committee

March 30, 2016

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). We applaud the efforts that the Senate is making to provide oversight of DCYF and ensure that the Department is meeting the needs of Rhode Island children and families.

DCYF is responsible for protecting and providing care for children who have experienced abuse and neglect, have behavioral health needs, and youth involved in the juvenile justice system. As the Committees are aware, DCYF has undergone significant budget reductions over the past several years. Given the critical role DCYF plays in protecting our state's children, it is important that the Department and its contracted providers have adequate resources to effectively protect and provide services to children.

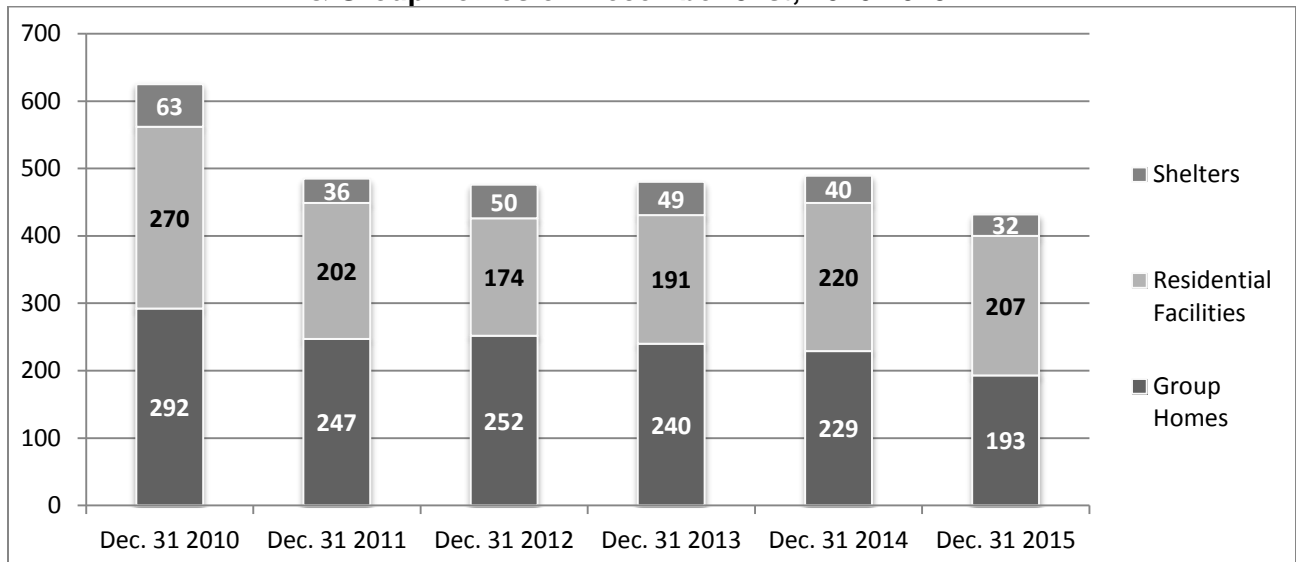
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is encouraged by many of the steps that the leadership at DCYF has taken over the past year and we want to ensure that the Department has the funding needed to continue making progress. DCYF recently began the process of rolling out Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and is re-procuring its entire array of services. We think that during this important time of transition, it is important that there is an adequate level of funding in the Department's budget.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has been working closely with Jamia McDonald and her team at DCYF. She is bringing intensive examination and support to the Department and we strongly support her efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department, so that it in turn can respond to the needs of Rhode Island's children and families. We are optimistic that the Department will continue to look for ways to dedicate more of its budget directly into services for children and families.

We are hopeful that as DCYF re-procures its services, it will prioritize services that focus on prevention and keeping children in families (whether that be their birth families, with relatives, or foster families) while still meeting their treatment and therapeutic needs.

Rhode Island has consistently had a rate of congregate care (group homes and institutional settings) placement well above the national average. While a small percentage of children with complex clinical needs may require a short term stay in a residential treatment facility, the goal of residential treatment should be to help children so they can return to living with a family. A national policy report that the Annie E. Casey Foundation released in 2015 showed that Rhode Island has the second highest percentage (28%, which is twice the national average) of children in out-of-home placements who reside in congregate care.

Children in Shelters, Residential Facilities, & Group Homes on December 31st, 2010-2015



Despite Rhode Island's high rate of congregate care compared with other states, Rhode Island has made progress. On December 31, 2015, there were 12% fewer children living in group homes, shelters, and residential facilities than there were a year earlier. As DCYF relies less on congregate care, it is critical that the Department recruits and supports an adequate number of quality foster families to care for children who need to be removed from their birth parents. This includes having a licensing process for both kinship and non-kinship foster families that is functioning well.

As you consider the DCYF budget, we would like to share some data from the *2016 Kids Count Factbook* that show trends regarding child abuse and neglect in our state:

DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline Calls for Reports of Abuse and/or Neglect, Investigations,* and Indicated Investigations, Rhode Island, 2006-2015

YEAR	TOTAL # UNDUPLICATED CHILD MALTREATMENT REPORTS	% AND # OF REPORTS WITH COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS
2006	14,957	59% (8,841)	2,862
2007	13,542	54% (7,363)	2,396
2008	12,204	51% (6,214)	1,913
2009	12,189	52% (6,362)	2,075
2010	13,069	53% (6,956)	2,392
2011	13,382	49% (6,520)	2,225
2012	13,540	50% (6,784)	2,266
2013	13,905	50% (6,975)	2,294
2014	14,735	51% (7,573)	2,413
2015	14,402	45% (6,470)	2,227

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST, 2006-2015.

- After five straight years of increases, child maltreatment reports to the DCYF Child Protective Services Hotline declined slightly between 2014 and 2015, from 14,735 to 14,402. Despite this decrease, the number of child maltreatment reports during 2015 was higher than any year between 2007 and 2013.
- During 2015, there were 13.8 child abuse and neglect victims per 1,000 children in Rhode Island, down from 14.5 victims per 1,000 children during 2014.
- Almost half (45%) of the victims of child abuse and neglect in 2015 were young children under age six and almost one-third (32%) were age three and younger.

We thank the members of the Senate Finance and Health and Human Services Committees and the General Assembly for their long-standing support to ensuring that children, youth, and families that are involved with DCYF. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.