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## **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new *Issue Brief: Adolescents in the Child Welfare System in Rhode Island***

Providence, RI (October 24, 2017): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, *Adolescents in the Child Welfare System in Rhode Island*, at a policy roundtable on **Wednesday, October 25, 2017**, from **10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.** at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI.

Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; Dr. Trista Piccola, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families; and Blanca Merced, President of the Voice Youth Leadership Training & Empowerment Board. Ms. Merced is a former foster youth who advocates to strengthen policies and practices for youth in the child welfare system. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Kara Foley will present the *Issue Brief* findings.

The *Issue Brief* presents data and analysis on adolescents in the child welfare system, including maltreatment and trauma, supports specifically for teens, and issues related to youth exiting the child welfare system through aging out or achieving permanency.

The *Issue Brief* also includes recommendations to best support adolescents in the child welfare system, to ensure healthy development and a healthy transition to adulthood.

### **Every child deserves a family and a permanent place to call home**

Stable, safe, supportive relationships with parents and/or caring adults are critical to adolescent development and healthy transitions into adulthood.

All teens need safety and consistency in their physical, emotional, and social environments, and require stable and nurturing relationships with adults to help them navigate life and grow into productive young adults.

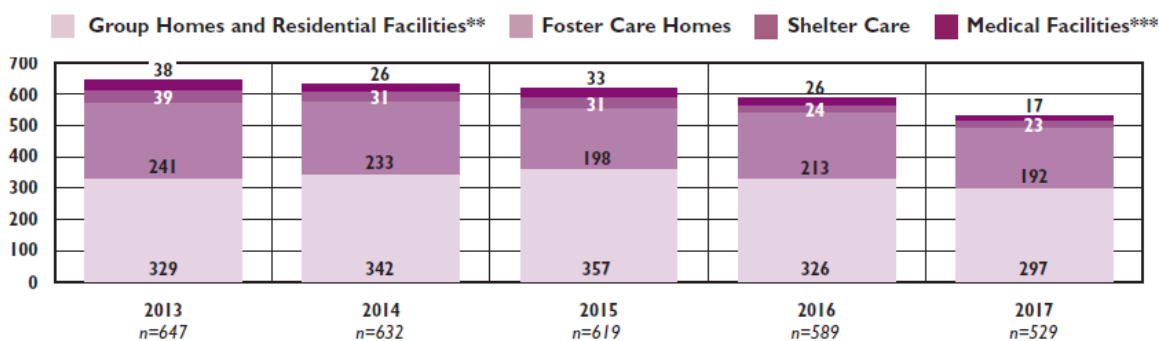
In Rhode Island during calendar year 2016, 22% (660) of the 2,976 victims of child abuse and neglect were age 12 and older.

In Rhode Island, ‘child behavior problem’ (62.1%) was the most common reason youth age 12 and older entered out-of-home placement in FY 2017 followed by neglect (23.7%), and caretaker inability to cope (17.1%).

Nationally and in Rhode Island, adolescents in the child welfare system are placed in congregate care settings, including group homes, residential facilities, and emergency shelters, at a much higher rate than young children.

Group or **congregate care** placements should only be used to provide short-term, intensive therapeutic services that cannot be provided in a family setting and not as long-term living arrangements.

### Teens in Out-of-Home Placement by Type of Setting, RI, 2013-2017\*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), January, 2013-2017. \*Chart shows data for a single point-in-time, January 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. \*\*Residential facilities do not include psychiatric hospitals, medical hospitals or the RI Training School. \*\*\*Medical facilities data includes medical hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, and substance abuse treatment facilities.

“Every child in Rhode Island needs a family and a permanent place to call home, including teens in the child welfare system,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “We need to work collectively and urgently to increase the number of foster families who will open their homes to teens with the supports they need to be successful in order to eliminate the inappropriate use of congregate care.”

For a listing of programs and initiatives supporting teens in child welfare in Rhode Island, please see page 6 of the *Issue Brief*.

### Disparities in out-of-home placements and congregate care

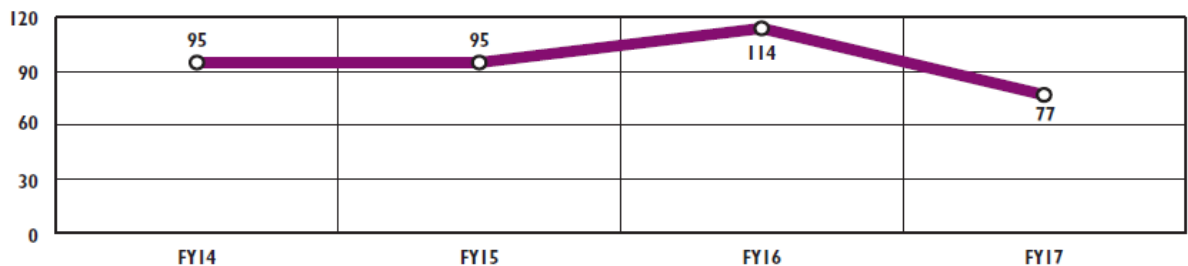
- **Racial and ethnic disparities:**
  - In the U.S., children of color are overrepresented at all decision points in the child welfare system.

- In Rhode Island, Black, Multiracial, and Hispanic children ages 10-17 were overrepresented in entering out-of-home placement in FY 2017, compared to their Rhode Island census population.
- In FY 2017, 45.2% of Black Non-Hispanic children and 39.7% of Hispanic children who experienced out-of-home-placement were placed in congregate care as their first placement compared to 27.8% of their White peers.
- **Teens in congregate care:**
  - Nationally and in Rhode Island, adolescents are placed in congregate care settings, including group homes, residential facilities, and emergency shelters, at a much higher rate than young children.
  - In Rhode Island, of the 422 adolescents age 12 and older who entered out-of-home placement for the first time in FY 2017, 67.1% (283) entered congregate care as their first placement.

**Exiting the child welfare system: achieving permanency or aging out**

- The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* promotes **permanency for youth in foster care through relative guardianship and adoption**, improves educational stability and healthcare coordination, and extends federal funding for youth to remain in foster care through age 21.
- Compared to their peers in the general population, youth who **age out of foster care at age 18** face poor outcomes in employment, educational attainment, access to health care, safe and stable housing, and criminal justice involvement. Without permanency or stable adult connections, they often have to navigate the transition to adulthood on their own.

**Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in RI FY 2013 - FY 2017**



During FY 2017, 77 Rhode Island teens aged out of foster care without achieving permanency.

Rhode Island provided foster care services for youth in the care of DCYF up to age 21 until July 1, 2007 when the age limit was lowered to age 18. The *Young Adult*

*Voluntary Extension of Care Act*, introduced during the 2017 legislative session, that would have restored the age for youth to receive DCYF services to 21, with tailored, age-appropriate services and supports, did not pass.

“The cost/benefit of extending care to age 21 is clear – it is far more cost effective to invest in tailored education and career training, housing, and preventive health services, along with help in navigating these systems, rather than paying much more down the road for the cost of failure in the form of homelessness, mental health issues, and unemployment,” said Bryant.

### **Recommendations**

The *Issue Brief* includes specific recommendations on ways that Rhode Island can support healthy development of youth in the child welfare system, and a successful transition to adulthood:

- Eliminate inappropriate placement of teens in congregate care.
- Accelerate high profile effort to increase the pool of foster families, including foster families of color, for teens and provide them with the training and services needed to be successful.
- Ensure teens who must be removed from their families are placed in family foster homes that provide a safe and developmentally appropriate level of care.
- Ensure consistent implementation of the reasonable and prudent parenting standards for teens in care including reducing barriers to obtaining driver's permits and licenses.
- Pass legislation to extend comprehensive, age-appropriate services to young people in the care of DCYF up to age 21.
- Pass legislation that requires teens remain in their school of origin when in their best interest and invest in efforts to support teens in the care of DCYF to complete high school and access college.
- Strengthen data collection systems to capture comprehensive educational outcomes of teens involved in child welfare.
- Recruit staff that is representative of children and youth currently in the child welfare system. Ensure all staff working with teens in foster care receive ongoing training in cultural competence.
- Use evidence-based practices to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ youth and youth with medical or physical disabilities in the care of DCYF.
- Restore state funding to DCYF to previous levels, in order to expand preventative programming and support for teens and young adults to stay in their families or transition into foster family placements with a focus on permanency.

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*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.*

*The Issue Brief was developed with support from the Hasbro Children's Fund, the philanthropic arm of Rhode Island-based global play and entertainment company Hasbro, Inc.*