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Youth and Advocates Rally to Invest in Rhode Island Children and Youth through Extended Foster Care Services to Age 21 and Increased DCYF Resources

Providence, RI (May 30, 2018): Youth in foster care and those who have aged out will stand with **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT** and the 39 member organizations of the **Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families** on Thursday, May 31, 2018 from 3:15 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. in the State House rotunda in a rally to “Invest in Our Children.” The rally is in support of the **Young Adult Voluntary Extension of Care Act** ([H-7110](#) and [S-2022 Sub A](#)) and **increased funding to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families** to meet the costs of increased need for preventative and protective services, increased supports to families in crisis, and additional resources for children in care.

Darlene Allen, Vice-Chair of the Coalition and Executive Director of Adoption Rhode Island, will open the speaking program. She states, “We have more than 2,000 amazing, talented and beautiful infants, children and youth placed, through no fault of their own, in our foster care system. They are counting on us to invest in their safety and well-being.”

The Voluntary Extension of Care Act legislative sponsors will center the brief program. Representative Deborah L. Ruggiero (D-Jamestown/Middletown) sponsors House bill 7110 and Senator Louis DiPalma (D-Middletown/Newport) sponsors of Senate bill 2022 Sub A which passed the Senate unanimously on May 23, 2018.

“We have to do what's right for foster kids and stop paying for failure. This is my legislative priority because most teens aren't ready to be adults at the stroke of midnight on their 18th birthday. They need help and support finding an apartment, getting a job, paying rent and getting an education,” says Rep Deborah Ruggiero. “It's extraordinary that we have DLT, DHS, DCYF, RI Family Court and RIDE all working together to provide services for foster kids until 21 so they can become self-sustaining adults.”

Senator DiPalma states, “It is critical that we continue to invest in the children/youth that are in the care of the state, especially as DCYF is in the midst of a system transformation/transition. Additionally, we need to bring the Voluntary Extension of Care legislation, which is also included in Governor Raimondo’s proposed budget, over the goal-line. They’re counting on us!”

Trista Piccola, PhD, Director of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families emphasizes, “As a state, we need to continue our efforts to invest in our children and preventative efforts that strengthen communities and families. The Voluntary Extension of Care Act is a perfect example of the investments our state’s children and youth deserve. Voluntary Extension of Care will allow older youth in DCYF care to receive the supports they need as they transition into adulthood. I am thankful to lawmakers, particularly Senator DiPalma and Representative Ruggiero, the Governor, DCYF staff, the Family Court, advocates, providers, families, and youth, who are working tirelessly on these issues.”

“It is critical that Rhode Island join 25 other states across the country in extending care to 18 to 21 year olds to support their successful transitions to becoming the productive adults our state needs them to be. Providing tailored services to age 21 will result in increased educational attainment and increased lifetime earnings that will more than offset the cost to the state,” says Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Closing out the rally, which will include opportunities for impromptu statements by General Assembly members and youth, Tanja Kubas-Meyer, Executive Director of the RI Coalition for Children and Families will note “All our state’s children matter from birth to 21 years of age. It is essential that we invest in our most vulnerable children to ensure that they are safe, that they have opportunities for growth and learning, and that they have enough time to succeed.”

Youth aging out at age 18 without needed supports are more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed or underemployed, become homeless, become pregnant, and develop mental health issues. These negative outcomes mean that Rhode Island is already paying the cost of failure for youth aging out of foster care at age 18 including higher cash assistance/welfare costs, higher cost of incarceration, homelessness, lost wages and educational attainment due to unplanned pregnancies and emergency mental health treatment and addiction costs.

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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.

Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families works to promote the safety, health, and success of children and youth from infancy to adulthood.