



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

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**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2545 Relating to State Affairs and DCYF  
Senate Education Committee**

**March 23, 2022**

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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 2545 and thank Senator Kallman for sponsoring this bill and Senators Cano, DiMario, Murray, Archambault, Acosta, Miller, DiPalma, Valverde, and Burke for co-sponsoring. This bill would require that every child under the supervision of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) be provided a team of educational advocates dedicated to ensuring their educational planning, progress, and success.

Students in foster care represent one of the most vulnerable student subgroups in the country and are more likely to fall behind in school, have lower graduation rates, experience higher levels of residential and school instability, and have lower test scores than their peers. One-third of children in foster care will experience five or more school changes before they turn age 18, and such changes often result in lost academic progress.

In 2021, 24% of third graders who were in foster care met expectations in English Language Arts compared to 40% of students who were not in foster care. Thirteen percent of third graders in foster care met expectations in math compared to 25% of their peers not in foster care. The four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2020 was 84%; however, the four-year graduation rate for students in foster care was 57%.

In 2015, President Obama signed the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* into law which reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*. The law enhances collaboration between education and child welfare agencies. *ESSA* promotes continuous collaboration and joint responsibility between education and child welfare agencies in ensuring the educational stability of youth in foster care. *ESSA* also provides an important opportunity for school systems and child welfare agencies to work together to collect and use data in order to support children in foster care throughout their education.

Students in foster care need additional attention and supports to ensure their educational success. Last year the General Assembly passed legislation that requires every superintendent of schools in Rhode Island to create an annual report on the progress and status of academic

achievement of students in foster care and develop a remediation plan if students in foster care are failing to meet academic standards or disproportionately subject to school discipline compared to the overall student population. This bill continues this progress by requiring child welfare and education entities to work together to improve the academic outcomes of children in foster care.

The Rhode Island DCYF operates the Rhode Island Training School. Of the 109 youth ages 14 to 19 who received educational services at the Training School during the 2019-2020 academic year, 65% (71) received special education services based on Individualized Education Plans. We also know that there are barriers to youth at the Rhode Island Training School being promptly re-enrolled in their school of origin after release. The proposed team of education advocates could also help ensure that youth receive support with their reentry into the community and reenrollment into school and that they receive the special education services they need while at the Training School and upon return to their school.

We urge you to pass Senate Bill 2545. Thank you for your long-standing commitment in support of children and youth involved in the child welfare system. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.