



State of Rhode Island Office of the Child Advocate

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

March 27, 2018

Good Afternoon,

I want to thank you Chairman Abney and all House Finance Committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the proposed changes set forth in Article 15, regarding the requirements for lead inspections of foster homes. The Office of the Child Advocate recognizes the importance of each of the varying viewpoints regarding this issue.

The proposed change would only require visual lead inspections opposed to comprehensive leads inspections for foster homes. Although a visual inspection may be able to identify potential hazards such as peeling paint and wood trim windows, which would signify the presence of lead, there is no way to confirm the extent of the presence of lead without running comprehensive tests. Additionally, when completing a comprehensive lead inspection, typically this would include a test of the water supply to ensure lead is not present within the water due to lead pipes. Determining whether lead is present in the water is not something that could be completed visually. To get a complete picture of the mitigation needed to make the home lead safe or lead free, a comprehensive analysis should be completed.

However, the Department of Children, Youth and Families is presently faced with a shortage of licensed foster homes available to support children in state care with lead abatement requirements presenting as a barrier for the completion of the licensing process. Historically, kinship foster homes have also faced licensing challenges due to the costs associated with lead abatement once lead has been detected within the home. Kinship foster homes present children with the opportunity to stay with family members and oftentimes together with their siblings. This is of course a top priority of this office. We strongly support assisting families who are willing to open their homes to a child in need of placement, however we do not support relaxing the lead testing and abatement requirements at the expense of a child's health.

The Office of the Child Advocate would recommend exploration of grant funding for foster families through RI Housing and HUD lead abatement programs to assist foster families with the expenses to ensure that their homes are lead free or lead safe.

Additionally, throughout the lead abatement process, the Department could provide a provisional license to families while they are undergoing the process of lead abatement if all other licensing requirements have been met. During this time, any child placed with a foster family who has a provisional license due to the presence of lead, should undergo testing for lead levels with the frequency of these tests to be determined by their pediatrician.

The Office of the Child Advocate recognizes the need for change with the lead requirements however we would encourage further exploration on the best way to address this issue. The Office of the Child Advocate would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Griffith

Child Advocate