



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE

House Bill 7111

January 29, 2020

Thank you, Chairman McNamara and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 7111 which provides that every superintendent of schools will create an annual report on the progress and status of academic achievement of youth in foster care.

My name is Jennifer Griffith and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). As part of our role as the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

Nationally, children and youth in foster care experience instability in both living and school environments. As a result, students in foster care are at a higher risk than their peers of low academic achievement, grade retention, and lower graduation rates. Educational achievement and success is a powerful counterweight to the trauma, separation, abuse, neglect, and instability experienced by children and youth in foster care. Tracking data specific to the educational achievement of students foster care will help advocates and leaders in Rhode Island's child welfare and education systems identify trends in achievement over time, track graduation rates, and identify where additional supports may be needed in order to support some of our most vulnerable young people.

In 2015, Every *Students Succeeds Act (ESSA)* established a new requirement that students in foster care be included on education report cards to track educational outcomes of students in foster care disaggregated in the same way outcomes for other populations for students are

tracked. *ESSA* requirements and bills like H7111 will identify opportunities for child welfare and education agencies to collaborate on improving the educational stability and improve academic growth to encourage their academic success. We as a state have an obligation to students in foster care to continue to provide comprehensive educational supports and work together to ensure educational success.

My office supports passage of House Bill 7111 and is willing to work with DCYF and Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to ensure the educational stability, achievement, and success of children and youth in the foster care system in Rhode Island.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Griffith, Esq.", written in a cursive style.

Child Advocate