



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

House Bill 7204

February 4, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Craven and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 7204 which requires the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Rhode Island Family Court to initially consider the placement of a child under their care with the child's immediate family members or next of kin before placement 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 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.

Children do best when they grow up in a safe and supportive family. For children no longer able to remain in the care of a parent due to abuse or neglect, placement with a family member is often the best option for ensuring they can remain connected to their family, community, and school while minimizing the trauma of separation from their parent. Children placed with a relative may experience fewer placement and school changes and may be more likely to live with their sibling(s).

The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* requires state child welfare agencies to notify relatives when children are removed from home and make every effort to ensure siblings are placed together. Safe and appropriate placements with a family member can provide the stability and safety the child needs while maintaining critical connections to their family, culture, siblings, community, and school.

My office supports passage of House Bill 7204 and is willing to work with DCYF, Rhode Island Family Court, and the kinship caregiver community to ensure the safety and stability of children and youth in the Rhode Island foster care system.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer Griffith, Esq." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Griffith, Esq.

Child Advocate