



Public Testimony
House Committee on Finance
House Bill 5807
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Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

Contact: Emily Jones, Interfaith Coordinator
RIinterfaithcoalition@gmail.com
Office: 401-421-4111, ext. 161

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” – Proverbs 22:6

The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty is a coalition of diverse religious communities and advocacy partners throughout the state who have come together to fight poverty. Today, we are writing to voice our organization’s support of **the voluntary extension of care to provide additional support to young people, ages 18 to 21.**

Young people aging out of foster care face an incredible uphill battle. Many have experienced substantial trauma. In fact, research suggests that they experience even more PTSD than combat veterans.¹ Young adults exiting the foster care system are at increased risk for a number of adverse experiences. Adoption Rhode Island has compiled national data showing that two in five young people existing foster care will experience homelessness, half won’t graduate high school by 19, half will be unemployed at 24, and 4 in 5 young women will be pregnant by 21. These numbers indicate a tragic pipeline into poverty for too many of the young people exiting foster care.

We know that extension of care efforts have realized positive benefits. According to research compiled by RI KIDS COUNT, youth who have access to the supportive services of foster care from 18-21 are more likely to graduate high school, earn more over their lifetimes and rely less on public than their peers who must exit foster care at 18.² These vulnerable young people deserve the care and support necessary to make a successful transition to adulthood.

There is a strong precedent for the extension of care, both in Rhode Island and nationally. This bill restores the previous foster care age limit which had been in effect until 2007. About half of states have implemented similar extensions, providing extended support in this transitional period. Approximately 388 youth would be eligible for services if the age limit were increased.³

¹ See data and research compiled by Adoption RI.

²RI KIDS COUNT, “Child Welfare Face Sheet,” May 2017, <http://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Fact%20Sheets/5.23.17%20Focus%20on%20Restoring%20Foster%20Care%20to%20Age%2021%20-%20CWFS.pdf>

³RI KIDS COUNT, “Child Welfare Face Sheet,” May 2017.