



Testimony Re: Governor's FY 2027, FY 2026 Revised and Capital Budgets— Department of Children, Youth and Families and Office of the Child Advocate

House Finance Committee – Subcommittee on Human Services

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Madam Chair and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for elements of the Governor's FY 2027, FY 2026 Revised and Capital Budgets for both the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). These two departments provide critical support to the most vulnerable children and families in our state, and it is important that they are adequately funded and staffed to ensure that families are supported and children are safe.

We would like to thank the General Assembly for their investment in children, youth, and families that address the longstanding underfunding of the community service array. When the system is underfunded, our most vulnerable suffer. It takes a strong system of services and supports provided by both DCYF and community providers to have the array of services families need. Continued investment is required to allow DCYF to meet its mission -- prioritizing prevention and home-based services, having children's needs met in the least restrictive setting, and reducing out-of-state placements. Sufficient funding to support the DCYF community service array must be prioritized so the needs of children and families are met before unnecessary escalation and the need for higher end care. We would like to thank Director Deckert for her intentional and thoughtful work to reimagine our current system and listen to the needs of providers and the community. We believe we will see real change if we sufficiently fund the service array, with clear funding for service expansion, including meeting the behavioral health needs, intensive care needs, and wraparound services for the many families that DCYF serves.

We support the recommended \$4.4 million in general revenue (\$5.4 million all funds) to carry out the DCYF consent decree related to the hospitalization of children with behavioral health needs in state care, which was entered into with the United States Department of Justice. This cost includes 6.0 new FTEs for DCYF (5.0 Social Service Analyst and 1.0 Caseload Worker Supervisor) as well as the costs associated with a court monitor to oversee the state's compliance with the DCYF consent decree. As the recommendations of the court monitor are implemented, we recommend aligning with the overall goal of establishing a single point of access under the governance of DCYF for children's behavioral health, strengthening mobile response and stabilization services, and adequately resourcing DCYF. As the state entity statutorily responsible for children's behavioral health, they need to have adequate

funding and resources to provide a child and family-centered approach to screening and treatment and ensure that children receive comprehensive, developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate care for their behavioral health needs.

We would also like to voice our concern about the proposed 8.5% reduction in Family Care Community Partnership (FCCP) flex funding within the FY2027 budget. These funds are intended to address unforeseen expenses related to the care of children in DCYF custody. The FCCPs are a primary prevention resource for the state and provide resources from basic needs to behavioral intervention to address risk factors of neglect and abuse. FCCPs offer wraparound services and support to families at risk of entry into the child welfare or youth justice systems so children can remain safely at home in their communities. They are tailored services to the needs of the children and families that seek support.

We would also like to mention that the **Higher Education Incentive Grants**, which are available for youth in the care and custody of DCYF who wish to pursue postsecondary education were level funded again this year at only \$200,000. In 2024, 16 youth utilized the Higher Education Incentive Grant with the average award being roughly \$10,700. We strongly support efforts to invest in the education of youth in the care and custody of DCYF.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also supports the budget articles related to funding the **Office of the Child Advocate** (OCA) for their critical work on behalf of children in the care of DCYF. The OCA is statutorily mandated to protect the legal, civil, and special rights of all children and youth in the care of DCYF, and we support the proposed increase in their budget to carry out their mission of monitoring, compliance, and advocacy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.