



Testimony Re: House Bill 8089 Relating to Delinquent and Dependent Children – Proceedings in Family Court

House Judiciary Committee

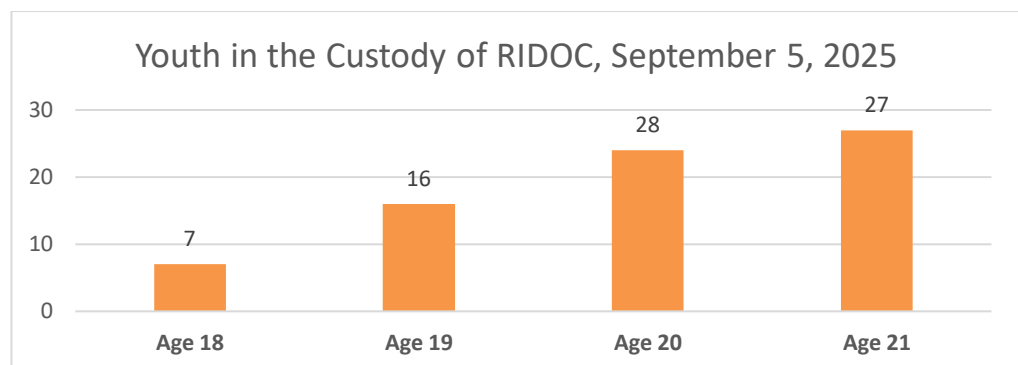
April 16, 2026

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would also like to thank Representative Stewart for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Casimiro, Ajello, Cruz, Potter, Kislak, Handy, Morales, Alzate, and Caldwell for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is in support of House Bill 8089, which would permit the Rhode Island Family Court to retain jurisdiction over and permit the detention of youth at the Rhode Island Training School until the age of 21 if the Court finds that it is in the best interest of the child.

Behavioral research shows that adolescents are less able than adults to weigh risks and consequences and to resist peer pressure. Their judgment and decision-making skills are still developing. As the adolescent brain continues to develop (research estimates the adolescent brain is still developing until age 25), most youth offenders will stop breaking the law. Because the developmental needs of youth are different than adults, youth involved in the adult court and justice system are at risk for abuse, suicide, and prolonged experiences in solitary confinement. **Many states are working to raise both the minimum age and the maximum age of juvenile jurisdiction, pre-trial detention, and commitment.** We would not be the first state to recognize the importance of extending jurisdiction to include older youth in the juvenile system. Maryland law now allows juvenile court to maintain jurisdiction over a youth who is alleged to have committed a delinquent act while a child until the age of 21. House Bill 8089 would do the same.

As of September 5, 2025, there were 78 youth ages 18 to 21 awaiting trial or sentenced at a physical facility run by the Rhode Island Department of Corrections.



Rhode Island Department of Corrections on September 5, 2025

The Rhode Island Family Court already meets the needs of youth up to age 21 in the child welfare system through the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) program. The Court already has the infrastructure needed to meet the needs of this population of youth ages 18 to 21 who are involved in the child welfare system and could also meet the needs of youth ages 18 to 21 who are justice involved. We know that the services and programs at the Rhode Island

Training School, which were designed with older youth in mind, can also meet the needs of youth ages 18-21.

Additionally, [students with disabilities who have individualized education programs \(IEPs\) are guaranteed services until 21.](#) Of the 133 youth ages 11 to 18 who received educational services at the Rhode Island Training School during the 2024-2025 academic year, 44% (59) received special education services based on IEPs. We are required by Rhode Island and federal law to guarantee educational services to meet the needs outlined in an IEP until the age of 21 and there could be a delay or disruption when transitioning to the adult system.

Extending the age of youth who can be at the Rhode Island Training School can ensure seamless continuity of education and other services. Seven youth received their GED and 17 received post-secondary education services during the 2024-2025 school year. There are also youth who are in the middle of certification programs at the Training School. There are culinary programs, barbering, CPR and First Aid, driver's education, peer mediation and conflict resolution, CCAP, and ServSafe Food handling certifications that youth can earn at the Training School. If youth are sent to the ACI to complete their sentence in the middle of one of these educational programs or certifications, completion can be disrupted or delayed.

House Bill 8089 would permit the Family Court to extend jurisdiction over a youth until the age of 21 and allow them to complete their sentence at the Training School if it is in the youth's best.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT encourages passage of H8089 with H7818 together to ensure 1) that young children are not incarcerated with much older youth offenders and 2) that older youth offenders can be served in the juvenile system – a system that is better equipped to meet their needs than the adult system. We urge passage of these bills as a joint effort to shift the age range of the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.