



## State of Rhode Island Office of the Child Advocate

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
February 7, 2018

Good Afternoon,

I want to thank you Chairman Keable and all committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony *in support* of the Voluntary Extension of Care Act. My name is Katelyn Medeiros and I am the Assistant Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Assistant Director of the agency, which serves as the oversight to the Department of Children, Youth and Families. As part of our role as the oversight agency, we have the ability to monitor the case of any child and/or young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights. The Office of the Child Advocate also promotes policies and practices, which ensure that youth are safe and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral needs are met. The Voluntary Extension of Care Act would provide vital support for our state's at-risk youth. By re-establishing the jurisdiction of the Family Court for youth ages 18-21, this bill will provide each young adult with access to valuable assistance and resources. In absence of such a bill as the one before you today, this population of youth will have limited resources, guidance and support from appropriate adults upon their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Although an adult under the eyes of the law, these youth often struggle to acclimate to society due to their significant histories of trauma, neglect and/or abuse, as oftentimes, the long-term effects of such trauma do not present until young adulthood. Providing them with continued support and services through the Department of Children, Youth and Families and the Family Court will give youth the opportunity to continue to address their childhood trauma while having a continued support system in place. This will also provide youth with access to necessities such as housing, food and clothing rather than having to provide for themselves. This will also enhance their opportunity and ability to complete their high school education, pursuit of higher education and/or vocational training, securing them a better future.