



State of Rhode Island
Office of the Child Advocate

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
February 1, 2018

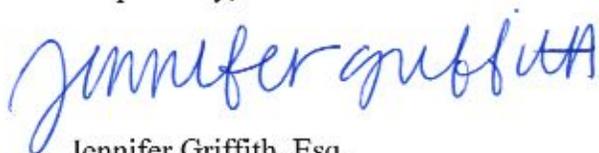
Good Afternoon,

I want to thank you Chairwoman Lynch Prata and all committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony *in support* of the Young Adult Voluntary Extension of Care Act. 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 the Department of Children, Youth and Families. As part of our role as the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and/or 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 needs are met. The Young Adult Voluntary Extension of Care Act would provide vital support for our state's at-risk youth. By reestablishing 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 a bill such as the one before you today, this population will have limited resources, guidance and support from appropriate adults upon their 18th 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 DCYF and Family Court will give youth the opportunity to continue to address their childhood trauma with a continued support system and will afford for necessities such as housing, food and clothing as opposed to leaving them 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.

I would respectfully suggest that the Department retain specialized social workers to assist with this unique age group of youth. Specifically, social workers who have displayed a vested interest in working with this population of youth. These social workers should be seasoned individuals who possess the knowledge of and experience with the available resources, supports and services for these youths and have displayed an ongoing connection and commitment to ensure the success of these young adults. Furthermore, to promote the success of this bill will require the Department to engage with service providers. Engagement with these providers should include more opportunities to improve, expand upon and develop appropriate placements, supports and services accessible to each young adult under the care of DCYF. This would assist with bridging the gap in the service array for this population that is currently present. We as a state have an obligation to these young adults to continue to support and meet their needs past their 18th birthday. I am hopeful that this bill will pass in order to allow these children a chance for successful futures.

My office would be willing to meet with the sponsors of this bill or any other parties of interest to discuss my suggestions. The Office of the Child Advocate is willing to assist in any way to ensure the success of this bill.

Respectfully,



Jennifer Griffith, Esq.

Child Advocate