



Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Caucus

NEWS

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HOUSE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS CALLS FOR BUDGET AMENDMENTS TO REFORM DCYF REFORM

Providence, RI – After reading the Rhode Island Child Advocate’s scathing report detailing missteps by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families -- alleging the department’s responsibility in the death of a 9-year-old special needs child in their care; and after hearing heart wrenching testimony by community advocates during last week’s House Oversight Committee Hearing, the House Republican Caucus is submitting the following amendments to the FY20 budget.

“Some of the most vulnerable children in our society are being left behind,” said House Minority Leader Blake Filippi. “We have taken on the role of keeping them safe and in many respects, have failed in this duty. If government can’t fix DCYF, it has little business doing much else.”

Personnel- During the House Oversight Committee hearing on June 13, 2019, House Minority Leader Blake Filippi asked RI Child Advocate Jennifer Griffith if she had any recommendations for the FY20 budget in regard to DCYF staffing. Griffith’s response was to **minimally** add 19 frontline case workers and licensing workers, and 6 child protective investigators. National child care standards recommend that the maximum caseload for each worker is 14 cases, however DCYF workers have been assigned a staggering 18 -20 cases, according to Griffith.

The House Republican Caucus will submit a budget amendment totaling \$2.9 million to add 25 full time equivalent (FTE) employees to the DCYF personnel appropriation to address the shortage of workers licensing and evaluating children in foster care, those being supported in adoption proceedings, and children eligible for kinship placements. These monies would be moved from appropriations to film tax credits, RI Promise and JCLS.

When researching national standards into proper DCYF staffing ratios, House Republican Caucus members uncovered additional red flags in the processes at DCYF.

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"What's more, the national average for cases is 14 per case worker. Federally, 'cases' are measured as one child in the care of the agency. Rhode Island actually measures it as one 'family,' which can ultimately translate to a half-dozen or more children in the same case. We need to address this in DCYF immediately," said Minority Whip Michael Chippendale.

Accreditation- A budget amendment to move \$83,588.30 from the film tax credit appropriation to a DCYF restricted receipts account will fund the actions necessary to initiate **RI General Law mandated Public Agency Accreditation (42-72 5.3)** for DCYF with the Council on Accreditation (COA). The DCYF accreditation mandate was unanimously approved by the General Assembly in 2010 after much scrutiny of DCYF's failing performance in meeting professional standards, yet no monies were ever allocated to this important review of DCYF policies and procedures.

COA is recognized by states and national organizations as an accrediting body with the capability and capacity to significantly contribute to the improvement of public social services and behavioral health systems and services. The quality of COA accreditation is recognized internationally and is referenced as a process that enhances organizational learning, reflects best practices in the field, improves an organization's reputation with external community stakeholders and enhances organizational capacity. The mission of COA is to "improve service delivery outcomes ---the safety, care and well-being of the clients at the agencies COA accredits is paramount."

Accreditation is a partnership between the government agency and COA where evaluations and leveraging best practice research assists in ensuring that the proper resources, structure and capacity are in place to achieve mission goals, deliver quality services, and certifies that the community is changed for the better. Accreditation also provides a framework for ensuring that staff are supported, experienced and trained appropriately. The accreditation process takes 5 years to complete for a total cost of \$246,765.00. The fee is paid over three years.

"Never, ever should it take a child's injury, or in this case, a special needs child's death to prompt best practice standards that should have been initiated years ago. Today, we submit that there is no excuse that can justify no action on these amendments when it comes to addressing the challenges at DCYF. Nothing in this budget is more important than the welfare of our children," said Representative Sherry Roberts. "We offer these amendments on behalf of the children of Rhode Island."

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The Rhode Island House of Representatives Minority Caucus (Republican) is comprised of the following elected members representing constituents who live in the following districts throughout the Ocean State: Minority Leader, Blake Filippi, District 36 (Charlestown, South Kingstown, Westerly, New Shoreham); Minority Whip, Michael Chippendale, District 40 (Foster, Gloucester, Coventry); Representative John Lyle, Jr., District 46 (Lincoln, Pawtucket); Representative George Nardone, District 28 (Coventry); Representative Brian Newberry, District 48 (North Smithfield, Burrillville); Representative David Place, District 47 (Burrillville, Gloucester); Senior Deputy Minority Leader Justin Price, District 39 (Exeter, Hopkinton, Richmond); Deputy Minority Leader Robert Quattrocchi, District 41 (Scituate, Cranston); Representative Sherry Roberts, District 29 (Coventry, West Greenwich).