

May 20, 2025

The Honorable Robyn K. Kennedy
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities

The Honorable Jay D. Livingstone
House Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities

Dear Chair Kennedy, Chair Livingstone, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide association of child and family services organizations that collectively advocate for the availability, accessibility, and quality of services that are in the best interest of the Commonwealth's children, youth, and families. We are writing **in support of "an Act Enhancing Child Welfare Protections (Child Welfare Omnibus)" (S.148/H.262)**. Below we highlight meaningful impacts of the bill.

Data Tracking & Reporting

We support the comprehensive nature of data collection and reporting and especially the continued focus on disproportionality and intersectionality in our child welfare data. We believe that this reflects the progress DCF has made in examining outcomes in relation to demographics to drive quality improvements and broaden our understanding of trends around racial inequity within our systems.

Recommendation. The current language to track "the number of consumers who have slept in the department's area offices overnight" we believe does not completely capture the problem to be solved. As challenges finding placements are important to understand, it is crucial to measure the number of placements and days from initial removal to landing in an "official" placement, regardless of where initial temporary nightly stays take place. We suspect that across the board, night-to-night moves in the first few days of removal are not recorded as placement moves, despite how incredibly destabilizing and traumatic they are to youth. We encourage the Committee to broaden this language so that all placement moves, starting with initial removal and including temporary stays while an official placement is confirmed, are counted.

Transition-Age Youth (TAY) Outcomes

We appreciate that this bill includes reporting on more critical TAY data necessary to ensure the state meets the needs of this population and adequately supports positive outcomes for this population.

Transition age youth are young people between the ages of 18 and 22 years old who are in the process of leaving or who have left the child welfare system. Each year, approximately 670-900 young people turn 18 years old in the foster care system in Massachusetts without a permanency plan in place and 59% do not have permanent, legal connections to family or caregivers. The state is required to ensure that young people transitioning out of its care are set on the path to success with appropriate access to housing, health care, education and employment opportunities. It is imperative that we track not just the number of TAY in DCF services but the achievement of these transition outcomes.

Advisory Council & Cross-Agency Initiatives for Systemic Enhancements

We appreciate the addition of a child advocate advisory board and support the child advocate's examination of systemwide challenges, including with multiple state agencies or secretariats to improve children's services. Cross-agency collaboration and input from a broad range of stakeholders is essential to ensuring families have access to any and all services needed to keep children safe and well. We encourage increased engagement with families, individuals with lived experience, and community-based child welfare direct service providers to continue to identify and address critical gaps and issues relating to interagency collaboration.

Mandated Reporters Training

We support the effort to make information for mandated reporters more transparent, comprehensive, and accessible, such as to actively prompt reporters toward other resources referrals for families, making filing a 51A the option of last resort. We appreciate that the public can submit feedback on the mandated reporting training at any point in time and that the office must report on the use and effectiveness of the training and the feedback that was collected from trainees. We encourage the Committee to regularly review data on mandated reports and the impact on disproportionate representation of minority populations in the child welfare system.

Protecting Social Security Benefits of Children in Foster Care

We appreciate the Legislature's inclusion of this important codification of protection to the legal benefits of which vulnerable children are entitled. We agree Massachusetts should become aligned with other jurisdictions that legislated the end of the predatory seizure of social security benefits from children who enter foster care. This is complemented by requiring ongoing financial literacy training and support to children in DCF custody. It also ensures children in DCF custody have appropriately applied for and received any such benefits – a practice that is not yet required.

Additional Protections

We support the bill's efforts to support school stability with timely enrollment and transfer of

relevant records and documentation. In addition, orders relative to minor children should, as called for in the bill, remain in effect after the minor reaches the age of majority unless otherwise ordered by the court.

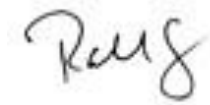
Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care

Recommendation. We urge the Legislature to include the **Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care** in this bill, as it contains important safeguards for children in the child welfare system with broad support from individuals with lived experience, state officials, legislators, and experts in the field. The sad reality is that many of these “rights” are already embedded into DCF policy but are not carried out with fidelity.

Key components of the Bill of Rights include as follows: enhanced emphasis on maintaining connections to their family, community, and identity, including with families prioritized as first placement potentials, duration/frequency of visits, positive contacts/languages maintained, health care accessibility, right to school of origin/education supports, right to age appropriate activities, right to achieve age-related milestones, informed of support/services available, access to case worker/attorney and certain documents at particular times, participation in planning, notice, records, and complaints. To further promote stability in foster care, there is also an increased emphasis on sibling connections, such as to first consider placements with siblings, to place children in close proximity to their siblings if unable to be placed in the same setting, and to facilitate frequent and meaningful contact regardless of geographic barriers.

CLM is glad to support this Child Welfare Protections Bill as a vehicle for continued progress in our child welfare system, and we hope these recommendations will improve outcomes for the youngest citizens of the Commonwealth. We urge you to vote this bill out of Committee favorably and work for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,



Rachel Gwaltney
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts

Supporting Members of the Children's League

18 Degrees

Ascentria Care Alliance

Boys Town New England

Brandon Residential Treatment Center, Inc.

Bridges Homeward

Brien Center

Centerboard

Child & Family Services, Inc.

Communities for People

Citizens for Juvenile Justice

Cutchins Programs for Children and Families

Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health

Evergreen Center

Fall River Deaconess Home

Friends of Children, Inc.

Gandara Center

High Point

The Home for Little Wanderers, Inc.

HopeWell

Justice Resource Institute

Kennedy-Donvan Center

LUK, Inc.

Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC)

MARE (Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange)

More Than Words

NFI Massachusetts

North Suffolk Community Services

Open Sky Community Services

Plummer Youth Promise

RFK Community Alliance

Roxbury Youthworks, Inc.

Saint Vincent's Services, Inc.

Seven Hills Foundation

Stevens Treatment Programs

Treehouse Foundation



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PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

Wayside Youth & Family Support Network
Youth Villages New England