



March 15th, 2023

I am a Rhode Island voter and representative from COYOTE RI writing to you today in strong support of H5359

H5359 "would prohibit the family court from detaining any juvenile or committing any juvenile, under the age of fourteen (14) years, to the training school, for any offense other than murder, first degree sexual assault, or an attempt to commit such offenses, and the court determines that there is no other reasonable placement to ensure the safety of the juvenile and the general public."

We need to stop institutionalizing children over petty crimes that could be dealt with in numerous different ways. The training school is a form of incarceration that traumatizes juveniles, casts them as "problematic" and promotes the foster home to prison pipeline. While locking children up might be the quickest solution, it does not help identify what issues the juveniles have nor does it provide the resources the juveniles need.

In fact we think this bill should be amended to anyone under 18. We know that a juveniles brain is not fully developed until they are about 24. We know children often do silly, mischievous things, due to peer pressure, and lack of supervision and one incident does not define that child for life.

We also want the committee to acknowledge that DCYF and our foster care system has been failing our youth for years. Even when juveniles are placed in state run homes they are often institutionalized settings, and we think these juveniles should be placed with families, as they deserve to have a family.

We urge you to vote YES on H539

.Thank you for your consideration,

Bella Robinson, Executive director

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